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Monday, 4 October 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Baali (Algeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 106

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family: follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.6)

Mr. Enkhsaikhan (Mongolia): My delegation believes that the commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons — with the theme "Towards a society for all ages" and on the eve of the next millennium — is an event of special significance. The United Nations and its relevant organizations, Member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations — in short, the entire international community — are actively celebrating this Year by taking concrete measures to make a difference for the elderly today and in the years to come. And there are well-founded reasons for that.

For example, according to the United Nations the population growth trend is such that by 2025, when the global population will have reached 8.2 billion, and the number of elderly will have reached 1.1 billion, thus constituting a considerable portion of the world's population. This phenomenon should be welcomed as a sign that in general life expectancies and standards of living are increasing, though, unfortunately, not evenly throughout the world.

The impact of this phenomenon on the socio-economic conditions of societies is already presenting challenges to Governments. It is in response to this phenomenon and challenge that the General Assembly decided to observe the International Year of Older Persons, the primary objective of which is to raise awareness of the fast-changing demographic global picture, with its challenges, and to develop and pursue appropriate strategies and policies at the national, subregional, regional and international levels.

My delegation takes this opportunity to commend the Secretariat for the work it has done so that this Year could be meaningfully celebrated. We note with appreciation the Secretary-General's comprehensive report (A/54/268), which provides us with a clear overview of the progress achieved in the field of addressing the questions connected with ageing and the challenges that lie ahead. The report highlights the activities undertaken at all levels.

The highlights of the expert consultation on developing a policy framework for a society for all ages annexed to the report, try to present a possible new "architecture of ageing", combining strategic thinking with pragmatic measures. We believe that Governments

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and appropriate organizations will find this document not only interesting and thought-provoking but also quite useful.

Since time immemorial Mongolians have revered their elders. This has found reflection in our well-known proverb: "Teachings of elders are priceless". This is why the Constitution of Mongolia makes special reference to elders. It states that every citizen of Mongolia has the right to receive financial and material assistance in old age. This provision of the Constitution provides a legal basis for the care of older people.

Mongolia's population is relatively young. The elderly constitute about 8 per cent of the population. Nevertheless, they still need our special attention and care, especially today. The reason is that, like many other countries undergoing fundamental changes, Mongolia is grappling with the challenges of the transition period.

In Mongolia market reforms have been boldly accelerated by the liberalization of trade and prices, large-scale privatization and other economic measures. However, the reform process has not been without difficulties. And these difficulties are directly affecting the lives of our people, especially those of the elderly and other vulnerable sections of society. The income — that is, the pensions — of the elderly has shrunk enormously on account of inflation and price increases. Pensions are at or even below the minimum subsistence level and thus are not sufficient to meet the basic needs of normal life. Though pensions have been raised in the past, the increases were soon overtaken by inflation and price hikes. The present Government is contemplating raising pensions further.

Bearing in mind the difficult situation of older people, the State and Government are taking some legal and administrative measures to alleviate their burdens. Thus, the Government bears the expenses for health insurance for older people, as well as their long-distance travel expenses incurred in connection with medical treatment. Also, older people are entitled to obtain soft loans for the improvement of their housing conditions. Those living in the capital city are exempted from city bus fares. As a result of privatization, many rural older people have benefited from the privatization of livestock. Special care and protection are provided to lonely people and to those who are incapable of leading an independent life. They are lodged in special care centres and are provided with free meals and clothing. However, these measures are not sufficient to alleviate the burdens of older people. Much still needs to be done.

In celebrating the International Year of Older Persons, the Government of Mongolia has declared 1999 as the National Year of Older Persons, and it is taking concrete measures to address the problems that they face in Mongolia. Thus, a national committee has been established and has adopted a comprehensive national and local plan, which is being implemented. The Year and other relevant activities are also being widely promoted through the mass media.

The Government of Mongolia recently launched the 1999-2004 National Programme for the health and social welfare of older persons. One of the ways of improving the living standards of older persons is to provide a realistic opportunity for post-retirement employment and thus enable older people to earn additional income. The recent amendments to key socially oriented legislative acts create a more favourable legal and administrative environment and also create conditions for promoting social welfare and expanding sources of income for older people. In addition, the Government has budgeted some financial assistance for older people who are actively engaged in small- and medium-scale businesses and cooperatives.

Despite all the support given by the Government and some non-governmental organizations to older people, poverty still, unfortunately, hits them hard. It would take some time and considerable economic progress to really alleviate the hardships of older people. However, the celebration of the International Year is in some respects helping reduce hardships and to raise awareness of the problems involved and the challenges that lie ahead.

Respecting elders is one of the notable traits of our traditional society and culture. We always respect and value the constructive roles older people play in society, including their role in the family, organizations, politics and well-being. As pointed out in the Secretary-General's report, Mongolia is taking measures to make appropriate use of the skills and wisdom of retirees, as well as encouraging older persons to share their life and work experience with the younger generation.

Finally, as a sponsor of the draft resolution on this item, my delegation expresses the hope that it will be adopted without a vote, just as have been similar resolutions in previous years.

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation supports the statement made by the

representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

In 1992, at its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly adopted a resolution designating the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. This was indicative of the fact that the problem of population ageing has become a major global issue and is attracting wide concern and attention from the international community. We are heartened to note that in the years since the 1982 World Assembly on Ageing, the United Nations has taken a series of positive steps that have helped make the international community pay more attention to the issue of population ageing. The decision of the United Nations to make the last year of the millennium the International Year of Older Persons, and its relevant activities at various levels throughout the world, are of great significance in further drawing the attention of the entire world to the issue of ageing. They are providing a strong impetus for countries around the world to make efforts to address the issue and for the implementation of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

As a result of progress in the economic, scientific and technological, educational, cultural and health areas in China and improvements in the standards of living of the Chinese people, the average life expectancy of the Chinese people has been rising and has now reached approximately 70 years of age. Therefore, both the absolute number of elderly Chinese and the percentage of our overall population that is elderly are on the rise. It is projected that by the year 2020 there will be 230 million elderly people in China, accounting for 15.6 per cent of the overall population. The size of this population is expected to continue to rise, reaching 410 million by the year 2050. By then, the elderly will make up 27.4 per cent of the overall population. That means that one out of every four people will be elderly.

Such a huge elderly population and its rapid growth will pose a severe challenge to a country such as China, whose economy is still not very developed. The Chinese Government has made the issue a high priority and has taken action in the areas of legislation and social welfare. We formulated the China development plan of action on ageing. In this plan we set specific goals for our work so as to ensure that elderly people will be supported, enjoy medical care, contribute to society, engage in lifelong learning and live happily.

Gradually a social-welfare system suited to Chinese conditions is taking shape. This system integrates the role of the Government, the community, the family and the individual. To date we have been successful in trying out this programme.

The Chinese Government vigorously supported the United Nations resolution naming this year the International Year of Older Persons. We also supported other relevant resolutions of the Organization. On 28 October 1998, on behalf of the State Council and President Jiang Zemin, Vice-President Hu Jin Tao made a nationwide televised speech on the commemoration of the International Year. This helped to publicize the International Year and its theme of "a society for all ages".

The State Council issued a circular to departments and ministries under its authority and to local Governments at various levels, calling upon them to organize commemorative activities. The response to date has been very active. At the State level, the coordinating agency for such activities, the China National Committee on Ageing, played an active role in this regard. Large numbers of national and local non-governmental organizations, organizations of the elderly and the media, and many private associations have carried out commemorative activities. In addition, the Chinese Government is working diligently on the report of the People's Republic of China on ageing and will soon submit it to the United Nations. The report will further detail China's commemorative activities for the International Year.

Humanity is moving towards a new millennium, in which the ageing of the population will become a major social issue. It is a particularly complex question for the developing countries. We call on the United Nations to take even more meaningful measures to enrich and strengthen the work of relevant United Nations bodies and agencies and to offer more technological assistance and support to developing countries, especially those with a large population that is ageing at an accelerated rate. We are confident that, with the concerted efforts of the entire international community, humanity will surely usher in a society for all ages.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to speak on this glorious occasion in celebration of the International Year of Older Persons, not only out of gratitude to those who have devoted their experience, energies and lives to the service of society, but also out of our belief that their continuous generosity and accumulated expertise will greatly contribute to a

brighter future. I wish to associate myself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

There is no doubt that comprehensive care for the elderly is a noble goal that we must seek to achieve either through official institutions and associated authorities and agencies, or through the voluntary services of popular and civil organizations, or by activating and enhancing the direct role of the family or foster families in caring for the elderly. Increased awareness of and improved health care for older persons have indeed raised life expectancy to rates far higher than those of the past, leading to an exponential increase in the proportion of older persons to other age groups in Egyptian society. Statistics show similar rates for men and women.

In Egypt, we use age as an objective criterion for defining older persons. We do not use the subjective criteria of the symptoms of ageing, with all its related health problems and social implications. This may differ from criteria used in other countries. Thus, we consider anyone over the age of 60 to be an older person.

Our Government bases its policy for achieving a dignified life for older persons on our tolerant religious beliefs and social values, which have been rooted in Egyptian society since time immemorial. In implementing our policies, we resort to many tools, including coordination between the institutions that can play fundamental or auxiliary roles in the provision of services or patterns of care or support for the elderly, with a view to maximizing the benefits derived from our social policies in this regard.

The Egyptian Government, represented by the Ministry of Social Security and Social Affairs, supports civil and voluntary work by providing financial contribution or necessary technical support to voluntary societies with a view to involving them in the comprehensive plan for the care of older persons. Egypt is conducting a vast campaign to increase older person's awareness of their rights. We have been collecting categorized data on older persons and cataloguing all relevant legislations to use as benchmarks in this regard.

The Government draws on the skills of experts and specialists in the field of psychotherapy for the elderly in order to prepare them psychologically and socially to accept their ageing. We have been modernizing state services offered to various social groups, especially those dealing with health care for older persons. We have increased the number of offices for home services to older persons and built new, modern nursing homes for those who are unable to help themselves medically or financially. Under the theme "a society for developed a programme to establish links between young and older persons with a view to achieving continuity between generations through joint activities that promote interaction and integration of all age groups.

Given the importance we attach to the question of older persons at the international level, Egypt has participated with the international community in the celebrating the International Year of Older Persons. The Government has developed a plan that will be fully implemented by the end of October 1999. We have promoted the International Year of Older Persons in all mass media — audio, visual and written. We have also issued a commemorative stamp on the occasion of the International Year and a guide for services available to retirees and senior citizens. The Government has organized seminars to discuss the current situation of older persons and their physical, psychological and social problems, in addition to enhancing the active role that they themselves can play in developing their society by providing support to families, which are the nuclei of the community, and in other fields to which older persons can contribute.

There is no doubt that national efforts cannot work in a vacuum. In order to be fruitful, those efforts must result in a favourable international climate supported by technical expertise and financial resources. In this regard, I would be remiss if I failed to thank the Secretary-General for his report in document A/54/268, entitled "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies". The report assesses United Nations efforts reflecting the prominent place enjoyed by older persons on the international development agenda. We note with appreciation that the report stresses four fields that are intrinsically related to the welfare of older persons: the situation of older persons, lifelong individual development, multi-generational relationships and population ageing and development.

In this regard, I would like to pay tribute to the constructive role played by the United Nations system in all these fields, whether by organizing seminars or providing financial and technical assistance to States. We call on the United Nations to continue these efforts, without which States cannot implement their national plans successfully.

A productive and favourable international climate cannot be provided without the concerted efforts and the will of all members of the international community, be they States or organizations. In addition to United Nations efforts to provide a coordinating framework and carry out joint action — and we do welcome its activities in this field — we believe that individual countries are responsible for activating such collective action by providing material and technical resources.

We must not overlook the adverse effects experienced by developing countries as a result of the phenomenon of globalization, which impede those countries' implementation of their development plans and their efforts to raise the living standards of their citizens in a world characterized by a widening gap between the rich and the poor. The numbers of the rich increase; the "haves" have more and the "have-nots" have less.

International cooperation must acquire a new dimension that makes the "haves" more responsible, so that the fabric of international society does not disintegrate. Under these adverse conditions, the developed countries, more than ever, must abide by their pledges to development efforts, including maintaining their official development assistance levels.

Mr. Rahman (Malaysia): I feel honoured to be able to participate in this meeting of the Assembly on the subject of the ageing population, which I am sure is of increasing concern to all of us. My delegation congratulates the United Nations on its persistent and tireless efforts for the past three decades, culminating in the designation of this year, 1999, as the International Year of Older Persons. It is indeed a timely wake-up call for the international community to evolve a paradigm shift and change of mindset on this important issue of the emerging phenomena of individuals living longer, leading to the growing upward trend of ageing in the population of the world.

The empowerment of women, with an expanded access to education and employment, and the advent of science and technology with its attendant improvements in health care and lifestyle, have led to a world demographic transition in mortality and fertility rate declines, while life expectancy is continuously on the rise. These phenomena present a new set of challenges and opportunities to all nations. Their impact on macroeconomic policies and on social and sustainable development, though obvious, requires a further in-depth and integrated study and analysis.

The needs of the elderly are basically the same as those of other generations: food, shelter, jobs, education and the protection of legal rights. However, they also require opportunities and support systems to enable them to enjoy income generation, social security and health care. The challenge for Governments now is how to incorporate and reflect these new, greater needs in their resource allocations, services and legal and other related institutional frameworks.

The elderly generation should not be viewed as a depreciating asset, as, with a proper set of policies in place, they can continue to lead rich and useful lives and contribute positively to the community.

The approach and response to this challenge of the elderly population may certainly differ from country to country, as each is governed by its own set of traditions, norms and values, but the common overriding concern is to extend care and love.

Traditionally, Malaysian society, with its inherent religious beliefs and Eastern social values, extends its care and love to the elderly. However, with the empowerment of women, rising economic well-being and urbanization, there is already a decline in the number of extended family units. It is in this context that the Government, together with the private sector, non-governmental organizations and the community at large, may have to actively intervene.

By the year 2000 the majority of the world's older persons, roughly 51 per cent, will reside in urban areas. In the developed countries, about 78 per cent of elderly women and 75 per cent of elderly men will be in urban areas, whereas in the developing countries the majority of the older persons of both genders will remain in the rural areas. Today, when the world population has already reached 6 billion, 1 in every 10 persons is 60 years of age or older. By 2030 more than 1.4 billion persons will be over 60 years old, most of them in Asia and the Pacific region. By the year 2050 one out of five persons, and by the year 2150 one out of three, will be over the age of 60. These demographic projections entail an urgent need for effective collaboration between Governments, international institutions and private organizations to formulate an integrated line of action so as to ensure that this segment of society is not excluded, marginalized or made into an underclass, but taken into the mainstream of national life.

In Malaysia it is estimated that by the year 2000 about 6.1 per cent of the population, or 1.4 million persons, will be age 60 and above. Demographic projection anticipates that by the year 2020 the number of elderly in Malaysia will rise to 3.2 million persons, or 9.5 per cent of its population. It is in the context of this population trend that, on 25 October 1995, the Malaysian Government formulated the National Policy on the Elderly. The policy, *inter alia*, incorporates self-respect and honour; self-reliance; participation in life, care and protection; and research and development for the well-being of the elderly as the main thrust of its strategy, which is in line with the five categories of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons: independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

In implementing the international Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted at the World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982, the Malaysian Government has also approved the setting up of the National Advisory and Consultative Council for the Elderly and the Plan of Action on the National Policy for the Elderly. The Plan of Action is comprehensive and contains proposals for action, as well as programmes and activities, that need to be implemented by all governmental agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, society, groups and individuals. These programmes and activities cover education, employment, participation in society, well-being, transportation, housing, family support systems, health, social security, the media and research and development.

Malaysia has been observing the International Day of Older Persons every year since 1991. Several programmes were held to mark the day and to highlight the issue of ageing, with the aim of raising awareness at the multi-generational level in order to promote active participation and networking.

Malaysia sees the preparation of the entire population for the later stages of life as an integral part of its social and economic development policy framework. Notwithstanding the empowerment of women, which has expanded access to education, employment and family decision-making processes, thus leading to an increase in nuclear families, lower fertility and mortality rates and longer life expectancy, Malaysia is taking effective steps to ensure that family ties and values are maintained and that caring for the elderly continues to be the family's responsibility.

Malaysia also encourages offspring to take care of their elderly. Since 1992 it has provided tax relief for them. Under the Malaysian public sector new remuneration scheme, medical benefits for public sector employees are being extended to their parents. The Government, both on its own together with non-governmental organizations, has also provided homes for this group. The future design of low-cost housing will accommodate the needs of extended families.

The action plan to implement the national policy for the elderly will heed the features of this International Year of Older Persons. For the first decade of the new millennium, the Government of Malaysia has established the Second Malaysian Economic Consultative Council, comprising 150 members representing the political parties, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, professional bodies and minority groups whose policy inputs will include ageing population needs in the context of human resource development, science and technology, poverty eradication, social engineering and national unity.

At the international level, Malaysia has participated actively in conferences focusing on the elderly. The latest was the Fourth Global Conference of the International Federation of Ageing, held from 5 to 9 September 1999 in Montreal, Canada, in conjunction with the International Year of Older Persons.

Malaysia will continue to take cognizance of changes in the characteristics and expectations of the elderly, such as the need for greater financial and personal independence, as well as developing a relationship of mutual reliance rather than dependency in its planning for the elderly. The Government is considering a request by the public service union that the mandatory age of retirement be increased from the current 55 to 58. There are now plans to provide programmes for upgrading the skills of older persons to ensure that they can continue to be a productive part of society. To alleviate the financial strain on the Government, there are also proposals to develop a private sector safety net and medical care system for the group.

The theme of the International Year of Older Persons is "Towards a society for all ages". My delegation believes this is rightly so. For every nation in this new economy of knowledge and human capital, the component of the elderly group is never fully depreciated. They are indeed a valuable asset deserving generational equity.

Malaysia is confident that this wake-up call from the United Nations will bring a message of hope and fulfilment to the older citizens of the world as they and the rest of the 6 billion population of the world brace themselves for the challenges of the new century and the new millennium.

Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan (Viet Nam): Seven years ago, in 1992, the General Assembly decided to designate 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. This decision shows not only a clear vision for the promotion of a society for all ages, but also our strong commitment to its implementation as we enter a new millennium. Now is the right time for us to take stock of what has been done and look ahead to see what we can further do to accomplish this noble cause.

In every part of the world the situation of the ageing depends not only on their individual development, but also very much on the social policy of the State, the socio-economic situation of the country and the family. Due to their age and health conditions, older persons belong to a social group with special needs. Under difficult circumstances, such as economic or financial crises or transformation, they become more vulnerable.

In my country, older people account for 10 per cent of the population. It is an age-old tradition, treasured by the whole society, that older people are respected and taken care of, because they represent living wisdom. In our present State policy, older people are looked upon as a generation which has made a great contribution to our magnificent national history. They are also glorified for having delivered, raised and educated younger generations to continue the cause of national defence and construction. Article 67 of our Constitution stipulates clearly that old people shall receive State assistance. According to the law on marriage and the family, the primary responsibility for taking care of older people is entrusted to their own families. The State, through its local mechanism, provides concrete assistance, such as financial subsidies, housing and medical care. The Vietnamese Association of Older Persons, established four years ago, has a network at the communal level which covers almost 90 per cent of the country's communes. This is a mass organization, whose main functions are to help take care of the material and spiritual life of older persons and to engage them in the political, social and cultural activities of the local community.

In such a national context, Viet Nam has fully embraced the core concepts and strategies originating from the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982 which have guided observance of the International Year of Older Persons. On 30 September 1998 the Prime Minister adopted the instructions on the observation of the International Year of Older Persons in Viet Nam. These governmental instructions set out targets to be achieved on education on the significance and objectives of the International Year and the adoption of updated regulations and policies on care for older people. This document also defined the duties of the Ministries concerned, as well as coordination between them.

A national committee in charge of the organization of the International Year in Viet Nam has been set up and is chaired by a Deputy Prime Minister. The Committee is responsible for organizing a nationwide programme to promote awareness of the significance of the International Year, as well as of international and national research achievements with regard to health and other care for older persons. The committee has worked out and has been directing the implementation of a national action plan for the observance of the International Year, aimed at promoting a happy, healthy and useful life of the older people in Viet Nam, encouraging the elderly to participate in communal activities and hailing and multiplying the good practices and positive achievements of individuals and organizations in taking care of the older people. Implementation of the national action plan is focused on the following: activities to show respect for and love to older persons, health care and medical treatment, upholding the older person's role in each family and the whole society, and responding to their quest for knowledge improvement and recreational activities in accordance with their age.

During the International Year, the Association of Vietnamese Older People has given particular attention to: encouraging its members at all levels to study, and make contributions through the Association to, the draft Ordinance on the Care for Older People; reviewing and assessing the implementation of the Prime Minister's instructions on the observance of the International Year; and stepping up a nationwide movement of distinguished older persons and preparing for a national meeting of distinguished older persons from all walks of life, which will elect representatives to attend the Conference of National Heroes to be convened by the Government at the end of the year 2000.

Given severe constraints in the State budget, the Government of Viet Nam has shouldered most of the research spending on ageing and has striven to improve,

step by step, the basic social services to all, including the elderly. The Government has also tried very hard to promote the awareness and willingness of every individual, family and organization with regard to their responsibility to protect and take care of older people. This has been done through the State educational system, as well as the propaganda programme carried out by the Association of Older Persons. In other words, there is a strong partnership between the Government and society through the non-governmental organizations working for the welfare of older people in Viet Nam.

Looking ahead, in view of the fast changes in the nature and scope of demographic ageing, we do share the view that we need to further promote investments in human development over the entire lifespan and support age-integrated social institutions. It is very important to reach out to the younger generation to help foster multi-generational relationships and to encourage the young to see beyond the traditional stereotypes of older persons and gain a more positive image of the ageing process and its effects. Another important area is improvement in research and exchange of information on ageing. We expect that the International Year of Older Persons will provide us with the impetus for a society truly for all ages in the next century.

Ms. Takamura (United States of America): A year ago the United Nations inaugurated the International Year of Older Persons. While the year has yet to draw to a close, it is fitting that we gather today to honour the past and envision the future.

The International Year of Older Persons has provided us with a unique opportunity. It has compelled us to pay more than the usual attention to changing world demographic trends, to consider the opportunities and challenges that emerge as a consequence, to envision our world in the next millennium, to encourage the development of an architecture for longevity and to stimulate our public and private sectors alike to engage in the development of a progressive ageing policy and programme proposals. Thus, we thank the United Nations for this special year.

I am pleased to report that during the International Year of Older Persons we have given strong emphasis in the United States to essential policy and programme discussions to prepare for population longevity in anticipation of the twenty-first century. A launching event was held last October in New York City by the United States Committee to celebrate the International Year of Older Persons. In December, we will formally close the International Year in Washington, D.C., with a special event sponsored by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the United States Committee and others. However, our policy and programme discussions will continue well into the future.

Last February, at the Commission for Social Development, our delegation reported on a host of federal activities to commemorate the Year. For example, the Department of Labor will hold a national conference on senior community service and employment. The Department of Transportation is sponsoring an international conference on "Transportation for an Aging Society" preceded by town-hall meetings in communities across the United States and Canada. The United States Food and Drug Administration formed a special agency-wide committee to offer activities and special informational materials aimed at older adults.

In addition, the Federal Committee for the International Year of Older Persons, chaired by the Administration on Ageing in the United States Department of Health and Human Services, convened a symposium in June which brought together nearly 300 senior administrators from across the executive branch to address the policy and programme implications of our rapidly ageing society. The symposium established a foundation to advance United States federal policy and programme agenda for older persons and their families in the twenty-first century, focusing specifically upon issues related to economic security, ageing in place, older people serving as resources, health promotion and care and disability and long-term care. During the symposium, we forged new partnerships to inform our policy and programme endeavours in the future. This unique federal-Government-wide committee will continue its work into the next century to encourage innovative and collaborative, inter-agency partnerships.

Communities across America have also wholeheartedly embraced the International Year of Older Persons. Our Governors have proclaimed the observance of the International Year within their states. A number of state agencies on ageing — in Illinois, North Carolina and California, for example — have developed resource kits filled with ideas for the International Year. National church groups, such as the Presbyterian Church's Office on Older Adult Ministry and the United Methodist Committee on Older Adult Ministry, have developed resource guides for congregations with older adults. National ageing and non-ageing organizations have

dedicated their annual conferences and their publications to the International Year of Older Persons and to the theme "Towards a society for all ages". New York, California, Michigan and Tennessee produced public service announcements about the International Year and established Internet sites to describe their activities. South Carolina used the year-long observance to highlight the special contributions that older persons make to enriching their towns and states. The Pennsylvania Department on Ageing joined its area agencies on ageing and other Commonwealth departments and agencies and organizations to generate more than 500 events during the Year. One area agency on ageing offered special grants to public and private schools to establish inter-generational programmes or events. Universities, hospitals, schools, private companies and senior centres all across the United States have all found meaningful ways to observe the Year. And of course a number of states participated in the Global Walk, held only a few days ago. These are but a few examples illustrating the United States commitment to the goals of the Year.

As the International Year of Older Persons draws to a close, we are mindful of the need to continue the momentum which it began. We will continue to draw upon the support of multiple partners from the Government sector, private industries, the non-profit community, the media and educational institutions, just to name a few. We have an urgent need in the United States and globally to prepare our nations for population longevity and to ensure that our peoples all have ample opportunity to plan for a longer life course and an improved quality of life.

In closing, I would like to quote Donna Shalala, our Secretary of Health and Human Services. At the symposium we held last June she said,

> "As the theme of the International Year tells us, our mission is to help build a society of all ages — a society where participation and independence and self-fulfilment and character and dignity aren't just lofty principles but a way of life for every older American."

This is our wish for all nations and for our brothers and sisters with whom we share the planet.

Mr. Ramsaran (Trinidad and Tobago): I am indeed pleased and privileged to participate in these plenary meetings of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. I also wish to associate myself with the statement of Guyana, made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The aged have worked long and hard, and to ignore them would be the worst kind of cruelty. We need to integrate them into society and involve them in all aspects of the developmental process of our nations. They have much to offer and we need to receive the treasures they hold. The designation of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons gives the international community the opportunity to focus effectively on this unprecedented phenomenon of population ageing and its implications globally, regionally and nationally.

It is anticipated that between the years 2000 and 2050 the world population could increase by 54 per cent overall, by 241 per cent for persons over the age of 65 and by 380 per cent for persons over 80. Furthermore, the majority of older persons live in developing countries, and it is estimated that their population will exceed 70 per cent by the year 2030.

Trinidad and Tobago is also faced with an unprecedented growth in its population aged 60 years and over. The results of our 1990 population census indicate that 8.5 per cent of our population is over 60 years of age. This figure is projected to increase by 13.9 per cent by the year 2000, slightly higher than our overall population increase. Further projections indicate that by the year 2020 their numbers are expected to increase to 15 per cent of the population. Our projections for life expectancy assume rates of 70.62 for males and 74.7 for females by the year 2010. The population growth of older persons can be expected to be even higher with the new trend of return migration. A recent survey of return migrants indicates that approximately 18.4 per cent of returning migrants were 60 years old and over.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has adopted the United Nations conceptual framework for observing the International Year of Older Persons, which identified its theme as "Towards a society for all ages". This theme was developed and integrated into the operational framework and the four dimensions identified were "Raising awareness: the society for all ages", "Looking ahead beyond 1999", "Reaching out: non-traditional actors" and "Networking: research and information exchange".

In Trinidad and Tobago, a national coordinating committee comprised of representatives of governmental, non-governmental and private sector organizations was

constituted to plan activities to observe the Year. The Year was officially launched on 30 September 1998 by the Prime Minister, The Honourable Basdeo Panday, at a cultural function which recognized the contributions to society of outstanding older persons.

To raise awareness about the theme and the objectives of the Year, numerous activities have been conducted locally. The main ones include the publication of several articles in the print media containing relevant issues on older persons; the distribution of information packages to media houses, non-governmental organizations and local Government bodies for further dissemination; the launching of a public awareness week; the sensitization of the public via radio and television programmes and the airing of a specially commissioned music video entitled "Blessed Are the Elders"; a holding of a conference on the issues associated with active ageing hosted by the University of the West Indies; the conducting of health clinics and fairs for older persons by both governmental and non-governmental agencies; and radio interviews with senior citizens. A Web site on issues relating to older persons is in the process of being established. This year the International Day of Older Persons focused on the honouring of centenarians, in addition to which the Ministry of Social and Community Development hosted a luncheon for older persons.

Initiatives have also been taken to achieve an age-integrated society. These include the introduction of neighbourhood day-care services. For this initiative, young persons trained in geriatric care provide daily care services to needy older persons in various communities throughout the country. In an effort to build inter-generational relationships, summer camps were conducted in Tobago for children between the ages of 8 to 14 years of age, with retired older persons serving as facilitators. Training courses were also organized for care-givers for older persons. These courses targeted care-givers at institutions and also those who provide care to older relatives and friends at family residences.

In looking ahead, and with regard to research, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is currently conducting a national survey of the living conditions of older persons. This seeks to collect data on the economic-psycho-social conditions of the elderly in Trinidad and Tobago and the physical conditions under which they live. We expect to do an evaluation of the needs of the elderly based on the survey data and to analyse the impact of the projected growth in this population sub-group on health-care needs, human resource development, housing, change in family circumstances and the provision of social services.

This year, the Government again increased the quantum of non-contributory old age pension to persons 65 years old and over. Approximately 60,000 persons benefit from this financial support. Furthermore, the income ceiling for pension eligibility was increased, allowing additional numbers of senior citizens to benefit. National insurance retirees enjoyed higher pensions with the introduction of new measures under the national insurance scheme at no additional costs to senior citizens. The 1998-1999 appropriation bill proposed to soften the costs of pharmaceuticals for certain illnesses which are mainly suffered by the aged.

Apart from economic and social security benefits, the Government provides housing and transportation relief for needy senior citizens. This year, a facility was introduced through the National Commission for Self-help to undertake repairs to houses of needy senior citizens utilizing non-governmental organizations or community-based organizations as monitoring and implementing agencies. Financial contributions to nine Government-assisted homes for the aged were also increased.

An area of grave concern is the care of older persons. I am pleased to say that, at present, the Ministries of Health, Social and Community Development, and Planning and Development are collaborating on the introduction of a programme of community care that will incorporate ageing-in-place programmes and home-care for senior citizens.

The International Year of Older Persons has challenged us to review and initiate policies to ensure that we promote the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Social and Community Development, a Committee has been established to develop a national policy on ageing before the end of 1999. That policy will deal with the challenges presented by this demographic revolution and with the innovative strategies and programmes required to respond to the heterogeneity of the population of older persons, their needs and expectations. It will of necessity focus on an integrated approach to the lifelong and society-wide process of ageing, the effects of globalization and the information explosion in order to realize a society for all ages.

At the regional level, Trinidad and Tobago has endorsed the Caribbean Charter on Health and Ageing.

The components of this Charter include "Creating Supportive Environments for Older Persons at Home, in the Community and in Long-Term-Care Facilities"; "Primary Health Care and Health Promotion"; and "Economic Security, Employment and Other Productive Activities for Healthy Ageing".

In the area of best practices for a society for all ages, Trinidad and Tobago has introduced several programmes in this respect. These include the Geriatric/Adolescent Partnership Programme; the Adopt-an-Elderly/Adopt-a-Home Programme; and the Retiree/Adolescent Partnership Programme. A Senior Citizens Bureau has also been established, and talk shows aimed at creating linkages between younger and older persons will soon be produced. Another initiative of the non-governmental sector is the creation of peer support groups intended to build solidarity among older persons.

Without doubt, much more is required to promote this vision of active and healthy lifelong ageing. There is a need to incorporate ageing modules in our school curriculum. If we are to truly create a "society for all ages", we need to target our youth and equip them with new knowledge so that they can reach their own later years as the beneficiaries of good health, income security and supportive social networks. We need to introduce formal training in gerontology at the tertiary level, and revisit issues of gender inequality, particularly as we recognize the tendency for women to live longer than men and their expanding role as a result of urbanization, migration and the high incidence of HIV/AIDS.

Let me assure the Assembly that the issue of ageing has been placed high on the agenda of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Only recently my Government, at the parliamentary level, participated in the Latin American and Caribbean Symposium on Older Persons, held from September 8-10, in Santiago, Chile.

We recognize that there is an urgent need to put in place the required measures to deal with this unprecedented and rapidly occurring phenomenon. I look forward to the contributions of my colleagues at these memorable plenary meetings and to share experiences and best practices to promote the interests of our older persons and to prepare society and the world as we enter the new millennium. This is important for future generations of senior citizens, a group towards which I myself am progressing.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I should like to associate myself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

In Africa, there is a saying that an old person dying is like a library burning. This alone reflects the importance that African societies attach to older persons.

My delegation welcomes the excellent report of the Secretary-General on the activities and legacies of the International Year of Older Persons. It provides a wealth of facts about older persons and multi-generational relationships in the world, and it suggests a strategic, holistic approach to ageing based on the 62 recommendations of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the 18 United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

Ageing in all human societies is both a success story and a challenge for humankind. I say a success story because of the tremendous scientific advances that have enabled us to overcome some diseases and to effectively treat or prevent others that can cause premature death, to be treated or prevented effectively. Life expectancy has increased, including in the developing countries. In short, the living standards of peoples have improved.

But it is also a new and major challenge for public health and social integration. When the United Nations launched on 1 October 1998 in New York the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme "Towards a society for all ages", it sought specifically to focus the attention of the international community on the daunting challenge of ageing during the third millennium.

My country, Senegal, welcomes this positive initiative and the important work done by the United Nations system, the non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society throughout this year. I should like to mention in particular the activities of the Economic and Social Council and its Consultative Group for the International Year, as well as the useful work done by the Coalition 99 group to disseminate the objectives of the year and to raise awareness of the challenges to be met to build an open, integrated, unified society.

In Senegal, people over 55 represent 7.6 per cent of the population. That percentage will rise to 21 per cent in 2010.

Because of our longstanding African traditions, which confer a special role and status on older persons,

and taking due account of the contribution of the elderly to the balance of society, and in particular to the education of young people, my country has always given high priority to the question of older persons. In 1987, a national committee on ageing was created, and a national day for older persons was proclaimed.

The initiatives and activities undertaken by Senegal since the launching of the International Year have made a great contribution to resolving the concerns of the elderly throughout our national territory. The Councils of Wise Persons that were set up on that occasion continue to be venues conducive to reflection, initiative and dialogue among older persons and, through their suggestions and proposals, help to guide the activities of local and State bodies in the area of social policies.

This political will is also reflected in a national plan of action drafted together with organizations for older persons, which each year are given an audience with the President of the Republic.

Senegal's plan of action seeks to promote what we call "productive old age". It also seeks to protect and assist older people by making it easier to finance projects for them, improving their access to credit and establishing specialized health centres. My Government is thus seeking to create an enabling environment for integrating older people into the social fabric. It is also doing its best to eliminate gender disparities and inter-generational conflict.

Although in Africa we may not have the same constraints as the developed countries with regard to the challenges of ageing, studies show that the rate of increase of the older population in developing countries is now more than double that in developed countries. In our countries extreme poverty is now very often creating situations that are harmful to the health of older people.

It is therefore important to step up our efforts within the United Nations to combat the exclusion and marginalization of older people so as to promote their integration into our assistance and social protection systems, including where there are humanitarian crises and conflicts. Because the elderly represent a precious asset for society, and not a separate group, we must promote respect for their inalienable human rights if, together, we want to build a society for all ages.

Mr. Fonseca (Brazil): Of all the major transformations in the structure of Brazilian society over recent decades, none has been more far-reaching than the revolution in its demographic dynamic. Due to a sharp decrease in birth rates and to a substantial increase in life expectancy, the Brazilian population is ageing. Whereas in 1960 those over 60 years of age accounted for roughly 3 per cent of the total population, this age bracket now represents 9 per cent, or more than 13 million Brazilians.

The longevity of individuals is clearly the direct and highly desirable outcome of improvements in social and health-care services. By contrast, its corollary, the ageing of the population as a whole, generates increased demands for facilities, benefits and assistance. This trend presents a pressing challenge for Governments and society, one which will only intensify over the coming years. Ageing is just as much a cause as a consequence of profound social, economic and cultural changes under way in society. Therefore, dealing with its implications requires an integrated approach and concerted efforts, both at the national and international levels, if we are to effectively move "towards a society for all ages".

Although the intensity of this phenomenon varies from country to country, and even within regions of the same country, ageing has been a concern to the United Nations since the 1950s. The first response by the United Nations was the convening, in 1982, of a World Assembly devoted to the issue and the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, which was endorsed by the General Assembly. In 1991 the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, and in 1992 it decided to proclaim 1999 the International Year of Older Persons.

The Brazilian National Policy for Older Persons, enacted in 1994, enshrines the goals and guiding principles adopted by the General Assembly in 1991. It seeks to preserve and enhance the social rights of the elderly by fostering their self-reliant, integrated and meaningful interaction in society. The guiding principles of this policy are: non-discrimination of any kind; understanding that the ageing process concerns society as a whole; respect for economic, social and regional variation as well as differences between urban and rural areas that affect older persons; and, finally, recognition of the joint responsibility of State, families and civil society in ensuring older persons' rights and participation in community life and protecting their dignity and well-being.

In order to achieve these goals, the national policy sets priorities for governmental actions in health care, education, housing and urbanization, cultural life, sports

and leisure activities and human rights as they relate to the elderly. Almost by definition, health-care needs and costs are greatest for the elderly. Therefore, the Brazilian Government attaches especially high priority to preventive quality health-care services for the aged. Family members and community centres, rather than nursing homes and other institutions, are encouraged to take the lead in caring for them. Out of respect and regard for those who have a lifetime of service to society, Government policy seeks to foster a sense of social responsibility to the older generations and commends active volunteer work in this field.

One fundamental outcome of the ageing process, especially in developing countries like Brazil, is the increase, both in relative and in absolute terms, in the number of economically dependent individuals and groups and the drain on public resources. So as to secure the rights of pensioners, today and tomorrow, a far-reaching Government-proposed constitutional amendment has been enacted. As a result, the welfare regime is being replaced by a more sustainable, socially just, democratic and accountable system.

Yet a revitalized welfare system alone will not address all the needs and expectations of our elders. The labour market cannot remain immune to this demographic revolution. The Brazilian Government has risen to the challenge of generating new opportunities for those aged 60 and over. The Ministry of Labour, together with the Ministry of Social Security, is providing professional training for the elderly in order to better prepare them for the demands of an increasingly competitive and knowledge-based job market.

An important clearing house for these multiple tasks is the Brazilian Committee for the International Year of Older Persons. It has prepared a programme covering the main aspects relating to the ageing process, including workshops and seminars held throughout the country. Great emphasis has been given to the debate on how to implement the National Policy for Older Persons, with a view to making recommendations to the federal Government, targeting the specific needs of the five different regions of the country. On the other hand, state and local governments have joined hands with volunteer organizations in promoting practical and cost-effective measures. These include an influenza vaccination campaign for the elderly population, social integration activities through sports and leisure and education campaigns for social workers to teach them about gerontology.

Brazil is truly committed to becoming a society for all ages. Yet if we are to guarantee the effective social integration of the elderly, we must first address the underlying challenge of ensuring that all have a productive and fulfilling life. That challenge is the eradication of poverty. Never is poverty more dramatic and despairing than when it affects the most vulnerable groups. It shatters the hope of youth and denies dignity to those in the autumn of their life.

To ensure a better quality of life to those advanced in age is a responsibility we all share towards the old as well as the new generations.

Mr. Suh (Republic of Korea): As we stand at the threshold of a new millennium, we face numerous new issues fraught with challenges yet ripe with opportunities. One such issue concerns the older members of our society.

While the pace of the current demographic trend towards an older population differs from nation to nation, the sheer magnitude of the numbers bespeaks a sweeping greying of global society. Given the immensity of this demographic shift, we must cultivate the hidden resource represented by older persons. For without their active involvement no society will be able to achieve sustainable development.

The observance in 1999 of the International Year of Older Persons, under the theme of "Towards a society for all ages", was thus particularly timely. Within that relatively short span of time, many important objectives were achieved. Among the successes was the establishment of a policy framework for achieving an age-integrated society; this framework, which has been refined through in-depth debate at various conferences and meetings at all levels, should prove of great benefit to policy-makers. In addition, media campaigns and other events commemorating the Year promoted public awareness not only of the needs of the elderly but also of their untapped potential.

The International Year of Older Persons thereby contributed to a radical rethinking of our concept of the elderly, who are traditionally relegated to the role of passive victims and a societal burden. The new perception is that older persons constitute an invaluable part of our human resources, and, indeed, that they are indispensable to the process of social development.

Recognizing that none of these achievements would have been possible without the dedicated efforts of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Older Persons, the Secretariat and the many non-governmental organizations involved in this issue, my delegation would like to express its thanks to them.

I now turn to my own Government's policies concerning older persons, and to the efforts undertaken by the Republic of Korea in support of the Year. The Republic of Korea has long striven to improve the lot of its elderly. In June 1981 it enacted the Welfare Act for Older Persons, which set forth three guiding principles adhering to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons: first, to ensure sound, stable, healthy lives for the elderly as people of dignity; secondly, to provide the elderly with employment opportunities and a chance to participate in social activities; and thirdly, to harness the unique knowledge and expertise of older persons in the service of social development. Since enacting the Welfare Act, the Government of the Republic of Korea has steadily refined its policies for the elderly. As a result, over the past two decades, most of Korea's elderly have enjoyed a range of benefits including medical insurance and old age pensions. But these policies often targeted only the most vulnerable segments of the elderly population, such as the destitute or the disabled.

Rapid demographic changes, together with the supplanting of the traditional, extended family by the nuclear family, demanded a new approach. The nation needed an enhanced, comprehensive and long-term strategy that would encompass all older persons. Responding to that need, earlier this year the Korean Government formulated an action plan on mid- to long-term development directions for the health and welfare of the elderly in preparation for an ageing society in the twenty-first century. The new plan places emphasis on building up the productive capacities of older persons and nurturing their social interaction on the individual, family and community levels. To help ensure that the lives of the elderly are sound and stable, the national pension scheme was expanded in 1999 to cover virtually all citizens. The intent is to make that programme a cornerstone of income security for older persons. Regarding the health of Korea's elderly, the health care system is being revamped to accommodate the special needs of senior citizens.

Job opportunities for the elderly are also increasing. More and more job placement centres are focusing on older workers, and special vocational training is also being made available. In the legislative arena too, the Government is striving to create a favourable environment for expanding employment opportunities for the elderly.

The Korean Government has also made it a priority to develop measures that will enable older persons to continue their social activities in the pursuit of self-fulfilment. To that end, the Government will broaden its financial assistance to senior-citizen centres, and plans are afoot to open a significant number of new facilities.

My Government is also striving to strengthen the ties of the elderly to their communities. Old age can, unfortunately, be a lonely time; by playing active community roles, older people gain a new, larger sense of family and enrich the entire social fabric. The Korean Government is working to encourage such community bonds by promoting local volunteer associations and developing life-long education programmes.

In addition to those concrete policy initiatives, the Korean Organizing Committee for the International Year of Older Persons and the relevant government authorities have organized numerous events this year on the theme "Towards a society for all ages". Since February, nationwide radio has broadcast weekly debates on this theme, and public awareness campaigns have been conducted via publications, advertisements and the Internet. Similarly, the national fair on the ageing industry, held in May, drew public interest and stimulated private-sector investment in that industry. Events designed to strengthen multi-generational relationships, a tradition that has deep roots in our culture but that has faded in recent years, were also successful.

Of particular significance among the initiatives was the Consult the Elders gathering held at the presidential office in January. Representatives from organizations for the elderly met with President Kim Dae-jung to discuss a variety of ageing-related issues and to submit policy recommendations. Such gatherings are expected to be held at regular intervals, giving older persons a direct hand in policy formulation and implementation.

As highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General on preparations for the Year (A/53/294), the best preparation for the greying of our society is to invest in all phases of life and to foster an environment supportive of the elderly. The Korean Government will step up its efforts to promote investments in life-long human development and to support age-integrated institutions.

To achieve those objectives, it is essential that we share our experiences and ideas. In that vein, my delegation applauds the efforts by the Secretariat, with the support of the Government of the Netherlands, to develop an Internet-accessible database of public policies and programmes on ageing. I am also pleased to note the success of the Interregional Expert Consultation on Developing a Framework for Policies for A Society for All Ages and of the Sixth Asia/Oceania Regional Congress of Gerontology, held in Seoul this past June.

My delegation looks forward to the Secretariat's report on the global impact of the International Year of Older Persons and to the discussions being held in these plenary meetings. The report will provide us with a meaningful framework for enhancing our long-term policies for the elderly.

Regarding resolution 37/2 of the Commission for Social Development, my delegation strongly supports the conducting of a review in 2002 of the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing, focusing on topics such as the interrelationship between ageing and development.

Even when the International Year of Older Persons has officially concluded, let us not lay this issue to rest. Rather, let us build on the progress made during the Year, using that as a starting point for the concrete work to be done. It is our strong belief that the new millennium will be an era of prosperity if we succeed in mounting a common effort to construct a society for all ages. The Government of the Republic of Korea will continue to do its part to accomplish this objective and remains open to the innovative ideas of others as we all prepare for the challenges to come.

Mr. Rosin (Israel): The declaration by the United Nations of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons was welcomed in Israel and was implemented through the appointment by the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of a public committee to celebrate the year in the spirit of "a society for all ages". Respect for the aged has been a time-honoured concept in Jewish tradition, as expressed in the Torah, our Holy Scripture, which was handed down at Mount Sinai thousands of years ago.

In the book of Leviticus it is written,

> "Stand up in the presence of the aged, and honour the face of the old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord" (*The Holy Bible, Leviticus 19:32*).

This commandment has been translated into the practical religious laws of Israel, both during exile and now in the laws and society of the State of Israel.

The proportion of older persons in Israel has grown from just over 3 per cent at the time of the declaration of the State in 1948 to almost 10 per cent of the population of 6 million in 1998. In Tel Aviv, the largest city, the elderly number 17 per cent of the population. The fastest-growing segment among elderly people in Israel is those over 75, of which the capital, Jerusalem, contains the greatest number. Massive immigration has contributed to the almost tenfold increase in the total population since 1948, many of the immigrants are old, but much progress has been made in service arrangements and legislation on behalf of older persons. A special example is the unique Nursing Insurance Law of 1988 for the disabled elderly, which provides for extra personal help at home, for dressing, washing, et cetera. In the first year of the Law's existence, 21,359 people received its benefits, compared to the 5,000 who received equivalent services in 1987. In 1998 the number had risen to 82,519. In 1995 the average proportion of elderly people in Jewish towns who received services was 12.6 per cent; in the Arab sector it was 15.3 per cent — the highest rate in the country was 25 per cent, in Kafr Kanna, which is a large Arab town.

A more detailed report about the activities of the International Year of Older Persons will be circulated here tomorrow. That report describes specific themes relating to the International Year, how they have become policy and have been implemented during the Year. The areas of activity include fostering relations between the young and the elderly, with particular emphasis on educational programmes; enhancing the image of the older person; communication among the elderly; and issues regarding the health of the elderly. Other professional activities relate to charters of the rights of the older person, the United Nations Charter, the charter of women's rights, the charter of the rights of the elderly sick person, legislative recommendations and academic meetings and conferences. For productive life in old age, voluntarism has been emphasized as a fulfilling activity. Creativity among the elderly has been fostered through writing and photographic competitions, which will lead to the exhibition and publication of their writings respectively. Many public events and media presentations have taken place with the participation of the older population throughout the country.

The appointed committee consists of about 50 representatives from various branches of society — academic, service, organizational, ministerial and political — that are dealing with the healthy and disabled elderly. As of now, it has met four times, once with the participation of the Minister of Social Welfare. From this committee were formed subcommittees dealing with welfare and society, the elderly and their environment, health, and economic and legislative issues. These subcommittees have met several times during the year. In addition, various key persons, mainly from the social services sector in 10 geographical areas throughout the country, were appointed to form local working groups, which are responsible for implementing the decisions of the committees and for carrying out local activities on their own initiative.

Much emphasis has been placed on inter-generational activity. Pupils in secondary schools undertake to assist older people in the community and in residential homes as part of a personal obligation, and this takes different forms in accordance with local initiative and custom. For example, in the mixed Jewish-Arab population of Nazareth, the Arab Chairman of the local team for the International Year of Older Persons reported that there were four meetings involving grandfathers and schoolchildren, which covered some of the early history of the settlement of the town. Interestingly, a social worker there composed a song in Arabic about the International Year of Older Persons, which was distributed to pupils.

Eshel, the Association for the Development of Services for the Aged in Israel, organized a photographic competition for schoolchildren, focusing on the way of life of old people from Jewish, Arab, Druze and other populations in Israel. The photographs included a Jew at prayer, an old disabled man being fed by his grandchildren, Arab women in traditional dress and others, and these were exhibited in the Jerusalem Theatre and in an illustrated calendar celebrating the Jewish New Year in September. In many schools, the pupils visit pensioners in their homes or accompany them for security reasons when they go to collect their pension. Joint workshops and seminars, voluntary projects carried out together and combined choirs of young and old are other examples of this collaboration.

Topics of special one-day academic symposia held throughout the year have included "The aged in Jewish tradition", "Ageing in the era of understanding", "Intergenerational relationships", "Ageing towards the twenty-first century", "Typology of the aged population in Israel" and, tomorrow, a symposium at Ben-Gurion University in Beer Sheva on "Futurism in Ageing". A number of conferences for older people have been held throughout the country, including workshops in which they were asked to express their questions, doubts and opinions about ageing in our country.

Creativity in old age has to be seen to be believed: a competition for people over the age of 70 to write about their views on ageing has attracted more than 100 entries, including quite a few poems. The intention is to publish many of them as a book, which will serve as a literary and academic source for the study of ageing. Similarly, the work submitted for a photographic competition between elderly photographers will be exhibited this month in Jerusalem.

The question of insurance for long-term nursing-home care has been discussed in the subcommittees. It, together with a number of legislative issues, such as medications for the elderly and recompense for care-givers, will be brought by our Committee to the Knesset — parliamentary — Committee on Social Welfare in two weeks' time.

Discussions of health are only one aspect. Last week witnessed a march in Jerusalem of 6,000 pensioners, as part of a national health programme of walking for the elderly. This group activity will be continued under expert volunteer guidance in coming years. Voluntarism as a regular occupation of the older person has also received much attention, and the organization of volunteer societies has been upgraded during the course of the Year.

In conclusion, perhaps the most result of the International Year of Older Persons — after the memories have faded of the entertainments, conferences, radio and television presentations and other publicity — should be a continuation of the momentum to enhance the positive image of the old person. The healthy should be encouraged to be more active, and the needs of the disabled and their caregivers demand ever-increasing attention. We hope that the International Year of Older Persons 1999 will project its positive lessons about the older population well into the next century. As we enter a new millennium, it is timely to remember the forecast of the prophet Zechariah:

> "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women will yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand . . .

"And the streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its streets." *(The Holy Bible, Zechariah 8:4, 5)*

Ms. Göransson (Sweden): The United Nations International Year of Older Persons has led to increasing international awareness of the needs and capacities of older people. From statements we have heard today it is obvious that the Year has stimulated activities throughout the world.

Sweden has the highest proportion in the world of people aged over 65 and over 80. In Sweden 17.4 per cent of the population are over 65, and almost 5 per cent are over 80. Sweden already has some experience of the developments many other countries are now facing. And yet the proportion of elderly people in Sweden will continue to rise; in 20 years one in four Swedes will be over the age of 65. The growing number of senior citizens will require new approaches to the task of organizing a society for the well-being of all. Not only is the proportion of elderly and old people increasing, but these people will also differ in certain respects from today's old-age pensioners. For example, most of them will be healthier and better educated. Already one in four people reaching pensionable age has a mother or father who is still alive.

The increasing number of elderly people in our community should be seen as an achievement and a challenge. It is an achievement because more people have had a better chance of living longer lives of high quality. It is a challenge because we know that in general elderly people are in greater need of health and medical care and of social welfare services.

During the 1990s Sweden suffered a profound economic crisis, perceived by many as a threat to their common welfare. Now that the economy is recovering its balance, measures are being taken to restore the quality and the content of our social welfare services.

The elderly and their welfare are priority issues for the Swedish Government. Just over a year ago the Government presented a national action plan regarding policies for the elderly. The plan includes national policy goals and measures to improve elderly care in the years to come. And may I point out that one particular problem confronting elderly care services in Sweden is the difficulty we have — and will increasingly have — in recruiting staff in sufficient numbers. The number of people of working age will decline in the twenty-first century. Caring for the elderly is a low-status occupation in Sweden, and people who work in the elderly care sector are mainly women. This is something we are actively seeking to change.

In Sweden national, regional and local activities organized in connection with the International Year have prompted wide-ranging discussions on policies for the elderly. Let me mention a few issues.

First, an important element in the ongoing development of Swedish society is its transformation into an information society. The older section of the population is at risk of being excluded from those areas of development that presuppose an interest and a degree of proficiency in the use of computers. Information technology can be used to enhance and disseminate knowledge and promote a just society. And, because it can facilitate dialogue between voters and their political representatives, it is also an ideal tool for strengthening democracy.

To prevent the growth of new divisions in society, we must guarantee that knowledge about information technology and the skills to use it are made available to all. To this end, we must ensure that nothing prevents development from reaching everyone in the community, regardless of age, disability or location. In one recent event, which took place concurrently in virtually every library in Sweden, elderly people were invited to try their hand at surfing the Internet. The initiative met with the greatest interest, and thousands of elderly women and men came to the libraries. The purpose was to help more older people overcome the initial resistance most of us feel when confronted with new technologies.

Another issue is the meeting of generations. An important factor in the creation of a society for people of all ages is our ability to counter antagonisms between the generations and create meeting places where knowledge and experience can be fruitfully exchanged. We live in a youth-fixated society where opportunities for public discussion between young people and the elderly are at best infrequent. When today's teenagers in Sweden reach the age of 40, they will be living in a society in which every fourth citizen is over 65. Now is the time for them to start thinking about the kind of society they want, and about how they themselves will be regarded by the young when they get older. A national essay competition for school pupils and an inter-generational conference are two examples of activities carried out during the International Year.

Over the years we have learned that one of the most important conditions for high-quality elderly care is cooperation between the health care and social services. We want to live a long life and we want to remain healthy. Many people look forward to retirement in the hope of enjoying an active, fulfilling life that lasts many years. The last few years have seen a growing interest in measures aimed at preventing ill health among the elderly in Sweden.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Government is now supporting several long-term pilot projects involving outreach activities among the elderly. A condition of this support is that these activities include staff from both the health care and social services.

Many of the proposed measures set out in the national action plan relate to the development of user participation in and influence on the support and assistance provided by the care services for the elderly. The reception accorded to the elderly and the degree to which they and members of their families can take part in the care they receive is one of the most important aspects of quality development in this area. During the International Year, we will seek to highlight examples of activities in which user participation plays a prominent part.

Let me, finally, turn to the importance of changing attitudes. Creating a society for people of all ages — where our senior citizens can take part and have a say in the decisions affecting the community at large and where young people will want to work in health care and services for the elderly — calls for a radical change in attitude towards the elderly and the ageing. One challenge is to change attitudes and bring people to regard the elderly as a resource. We also need to change the elderly's picture of themselves as being retired from community life. A fundamental concern in shaping policies for the elderly is therefore to transform attitudes and to enhance respect for older people. In this regard we have a lot to learn from other cultures.

I have sketched the broad outlines of Sweden's policies for the elderly and the reforms we are undertaking. I believe they demonstrate the Swedish Government's commitment to pursuing politics that are in line with the objectives of the International Year. But of course we realize that conditions and opportunities vary from country to country. In designing and implementing strategies and programmes for international cooperation, we must seek to build our policies upon the common understanding that all people are fundamentally equal and entitled to the same rights.

Mr. Alemán (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Today we have gathered to celebrate the International Year of Older Persons, paying well-deserved tribute to those who have reached a stage in their lives in which the family and the State have important parts to play in the creation of a society based on more equitable and human parametres for their benefit.

Time is an old cosmic magician who measures man and mankind with different yardsticks: a very short one for the human being, an almost endless one for mankind. But even if man's sojourn on Earth is brief, science and experience accumulated by mankind over the years have allowed humanity, particularly in this century, to make significant conquests. Life expectancy has grown by 20 years since 1950. Today, one out of 10 inhabitants of the planet is over 60; it is expected that, by the year 2050, one in five will be of that age, most of whom will live in the developing world. It is also a fact that women have a greater life expectancy than men and their situation deserves special consideration. We must therefore join forces in attempting to resolve the ancient problems that continue to confront mankind: poverty, inequality and the lack of development and social justice.

Poverty is a mandatory topic if we wish seriously to address the problems of one of the most vulnerable groups of society: the elderly. In this respect, Ecuador is no stranger to the slow-down in world economic growth; in fact, we may now be experiencing our most severe crisis in this century, exacerbated by an enormous burden of external debt. Together with poverty, inequity directly affects the most vulnerable. The unequal distribution of wealth is accompanied by a social security system that benefits only a narrow sector of society and does not provide universal access to pension and health systems to those over 65.

We must point out, however, that the Government of Ecuador has not been paralysed by adversity. In 1980, the Ministry of Social Welfare created a bureau dedicated to the interests of older citizens. In 1991, the National Department of Gerontology was established as the organ in charge of planning, assessing, developing and monitoring programmes for that sector of the population. Today, it coordinates the plans, programmes, projects and activities linked to the celebration of the International Year. Similarly, the National Council for Women pays particular attention to the problems of older women.

I wish briefly to introduce some of our national initiatives to create a society for all ages.

The Law for Senior Citizens has just been adopted to replace the Special Law for Older Persons. The new Law is essentially dedicated to providing access to a standard of living that ensures medical care, food, clothing and housing for all Ecuadorian citizens over 60. In this respect, the National Department of Gerontology is developing a campaign to disseminate information and increase awareness about legislation for the elderly and the International Year of Older Persons.

The National Human Rights Plan has a specific chapter on senior citizens.

The Ministry of Social Welfare has developed a programme to train grass-roots staff working in national gerontology centres in order to improve care for the elderly. General regulations have been drafted to standardize the functioning of the gerontology centres.

In April 1999, the Ecuadorian chapter of the Ibero-American Intergovernmental Network for Comprehensive Policies for Senior Citizens was established, uniting representatives of public and private organizations, senior citizens' organizations and gerontology centres throughout the country.

The Project for Technical Cooperation between the Ministry of Social Welfare and the World Food Programme was officially introduced. It is designed to fund and provide food for centres, community dining rooms, training workshops and recreational centres for the elderly.

One of the most moving activities initiated by the National Department of Gerontology was coordinating the National Network for the Global Embrace of the Aged, initiated on 2 October.

The Government of Ecuador welcomes initiatives to establish a long-term strategy for facing the challenges of an ageing population. We therefore consider that it would be suitable to review and reassess the 1982 International Plan of Action on Ageing. We also support the idea of convening a second world assembly on ageing in 2002 to discuss the issue of older persons. We are grateful to the Government of Spain for having offered to host that important meeting.

Before concluding, allow me to place on record the recognition of the Government of Ecuador of the untiring efforts of the coordinators of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez of the Dominican Republic and of Mr. Aurelio Fernández of Spain. We also thank the Division for Social Policy and Development Policy and its Director, Mr. John Langmore, the Coordinator of the Year, Mr. Alexandre Sidorenko, the staff of the unit and programme on ageing and all those who contributed, directly or indirectly, to giving this Year special significance.

At the same time, I would like to commend the decisive input and close cooperation of the non-governmental organizations, both Ecuadorian and international, who inspired us in our work, remained open to dialogue and were always ready to undertake joint projects.

May the International Year of Older Persons lead us to reflect seriously on the pressing need to face the challenge of jointly creating a society for all ages.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Khalil (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today we meet to observe a highly cherished and significant occasion: the International Year of Older Persons, in appreciation of and gratitude for the lofty status of this important societal category. The Year also recognizes its effective role in raising families and generations. In 1982, the World Assembly on Ageing adopted the International Plan of Action on Ageing. The General Assembly designated the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons under the theme "Towards a society for all ages". It was decided by resolution 52/80 that Members would meet to review the States' follow-up activity to the Year.

I would like to add my country's voice to the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Care for the elderly in the Sudan is primarily a concerted social responsibility. As a social institution and the nucleus of society, the family is responsible for providing care to its citizens, especially the elderly. The Sudanese society pays special care and attention to the elderly, extending respect, love and appreciation. Any departure from this rule is a deviation from the social order. The elderly's long life experience qualifies them to offer advice on matters of family and society.

Similarly, all religions hold older persons in high esteem and place them on a pedestal. God Almighty has decreed:

> Thy Lord hath decreed
> That ye worship none but Him,
> And that ye be kind
> To parents. Whether one
> Or both of them attain
> Old age in thy life,
> Say not to them a word
> Of contempt, nor repel them
> But address them,
> In terms of honour.
>
> *[The Holy Koran, XVII:23]*

Elderly women in the Sudan have a distinct and important role in society. They convey wisdom and traditions to the succeeding generations and contribute to the upbringing of generations. They are known for their great contribution to national struggle, particularly in the battles for independence and advocacy of women's rights.

The Sudan launched its celebrations of this noble occasion on 1 October 1998, which coincided with the United Nations celebrations and those of the rest of the world. My country has abided by resolution 229 adopted by the Arab Ministers for Social Planning regarding the celebration of the International Year of Older Persons from October 1998 to October 1999. Given the attention granted by my Government to his matter, the Ministry for Social Planning adopted, in April 1998, a ministerial resolution setting up a national committee composed of all authorities working in the area of the elderly. The celebration included many activities reflecting the interest of the State and society in the elderly. A popular celebration was held under the aegis of the Vice-President, at which mass institutions, the elderly, non-governmental organizations, the World Organization on Care for the Elderly and the United Nations representative to the Sudan took part. The grandmothers and the grandfathers of the Sudan were honoured.

It has been decided that observance of this occasion will take place throughout schools and various places of worship, by devoting the first classes in school to identifying the issues relating to the elderly and how to provide care for them. Similar activities were carried out in mosques and churches. Celebrations were held throughout our provinces. Furthermore, a postage stamp was issued in celebration of this occasion. A workshop on the health of the elderly was held with a view to setting up a national plan to provide health programmes for them. Among the most outstanding achievements of the celebrations of this Year for the elderly has been the elaboration of a draft law on care for the elderly in 1999. The final text will be formulated and adopted by the end of this year.

The Sudan also participated in many external meetings in celebrating this Year. We took part in the symposium on the elderly held in Tunisia in October 1998, presenting a working paper on the elderly in the Sudan.

The elderly, as is known, are the most vulnerable group. More than any other group, they need the attention and care of their families, society and Governments. Yet we see wars raging in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa, that directly affect the provision of basic needs to the elderly, such as health care, nutrition and security. There is a need to raise awareness of the status and position of the elderly during wars and conflicts. National and international potential should be harnessed to provide for their needs and to create an atmosphere of stability and tranquillity for them.

The gap between the developing and developed countries is widening daily as a result of the disparity between development rates and gross national product, the spread of disease, especially AIDS, the lack of resources and insufficient official development assistance. This constitutes a challenge that should be faced and addressed in the light of the facts before us.

Population growth alone does not, in our view, constitute a problem for developing countries as much as it poses a question about creating a climate favourable to these people to fully satisfy their needs in their old age. Therefore, we see a need for creating a just social and economic international order that does not differentiate between rich and poor countries.

In conclusion, we wish to emphasize our commitment to the issues of older persons and their rights, through the elaboration of comprehensive strategies and programmes in this field, at all levels. I wish to extend my thanks to Ambassador Alvarez of the Dominican Republic for her continuous and valuable efforts in this celebration of the International Year of Older Persons. We wish success to all in these deliberations.

Ms. Belinda Manahan (Philippines): I join other delegations who have earlier congratulated Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his election as President of this Assembly, which remains an important forum for the expression of individual countries' views and priorities. I express our confidence

in his able stewardship in leading this Assembly to a successful conclusion.

My delegation would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on the activities relating to this year's celebration of the International Year of Older Persons. The report is clearly an effort to describe in summary form the various initiatives around the world in response to the issue of ageing populations. Our year-long celebration dedicated to older persons is a fitting tribute to and a recognition of the many contributions older persons have made to the growth and development of our societies. My delegation is pleased to note the many innovative actions by and approaches of various countries.

Today the Philippines launches its plan of action for older persons, marking the culmination of the country's year-long celebration of the International Year of Older Persons. The nationwide observance of the International Year is our response to General Assembly resolution 47/5 declaring 1999 the International Year of Older Persons. The celebration has involved not just Government but also non-governmental organizations and the many and vibrant associations of older persons in the country. To celebrate the International Year, we have conducted seminars on ageing and older persons. We have given national awards to older persons in the areas of resource generation, community service and leadership and elderly friendly establishments. We have held photo exhibits, poster design contests and trade fairs. Last Saturday, the Philippines joined the Global Walk event dedicated to older persons. Quite fittingly, the event was dubbed "The Family Walk for Grandparents".

The tradition of providing family care to older persons is enshrined in our Constitution, which states that it is the duty of the family to take care of its older persons while the State may design a social security programme for them. This policy and tradition lives on, as can be seen in the fact that only 5 per cent of the older population live alone, while the majority reside with their immediate family. Recognizing the central role that the family plays in the care and nurture of older persons, the Philippine plan of action aims to develop a holistic and multi-generational care programme for older persons within the Filipino family network.

The formulation of the Philippine plan was guided by the Macau Declaration and Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific adopted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in a resolution sponsored by the Philippines at the Commission's fifty-fifth session, in April 1999. Following the lead of the Macau Plan of Action on Ageing, the Philippine plan of action likewise addresses seven areas of ageing-related concern.

The needs and problems of the sector are many, ranging from family finances to a perceived decline in respect for the elderly; the remarkable increase in the incidence of degenerative diseases among older persons; an environment that has been planned largely for young people; the lack of basic social services in the community where most older persons are; the high illiteracy rate; and the unscrupulous market practices to which older persons are becoming increasingly at risk.

Attention to the plight of older Filipinos did not begin with the country's observance of the International Year of Older Persons. Before 1999, two significant laws had already been enacted. Republic Act 7432 seeks to maximize the contribution of senior citizens to nation-building and grants them benefits and privileges. The Act created an office of senior citizens' affairs in every city and municipality, primarily to monitor the implementation of the legislation and programmes within their jurisdictions and the release of nationally uniform identification cards which provide 20 per cent discounts at recreational centres and restaurants, and on medicines and transportation. To date, a total of 1,495 municipal and 82 city offices of senior citizens' affairs have been established.

Republic Act 7876 establishes a senior citizens' centre in every city and municipality in the Philippines. To date, there are 201 senior citizens' centres nationwide which are being managed by local senior citizens themselves. There are 3.7 million older persons, or 77 per cent of the total elderly population, who are members of the Federation of Senior Citizens' Associations of the Philippines, the biggest umbrella organization of older persons.

Currently, there is a Bill pending in Congress — The Magna Carta for Older Persons — that seeks to establish a comprehensive, long-term, national programme that would give older persons continued opportunities for employment, livelihood projects and access to formal and non-formal education and social services, specifically in the area of health and housing.

In order to uplift their living conditions, our Government provides various programmes and services for older persons, including skills training and the provision of capital assistance for income-generating activities; organization of community-based associations for older persons that provide them with opportunities for socialization, self-expression and self-enhancement;

mobilization of older persons for peer outreach, child protection services, family life enrichment and similar projects; assistance for the physical rehabilitation of older persons; substitute family care for abandoned, neglected, unattached and homeless older persons; and, last but not least, after-care and follow-up services for those discharged from residential care facilities.

The State attaches priority to keeping the Filipino family whole and intact, it being the main source of care and emotional support to the older person and the basic unit responsible for preparing the younger generations for ageing. Yet the poverty that afflicts many Filipino families and communities hinders the provision of adequate care and support to older persons. We are responding to this reality by creating critical partnerships between and among local and national governments, civil society and other sectors in order to maximize resources and direct them to the neediest areas, sectors, communities and families.

The Philippines draws from its rich experiences in the observance of the International Year of Older Persons as we make the following recommendations. First, we urge the United Nations to further intensify its initiatives to strengthen the family to enable it to continue providing care to the elderly and preparing its members for productive ageing. Secondly, since lifelong preparation for ageing entails the provision of basic services for human development, including the expansion of coverage of social security schemes, especially in the informal sector, the United Nations needs to urge Member countries to adopt and implement the 20/20 compact, whereby 20 per cent of gross national product and 20 per cent of official development assistance are allotted to the provision of basic social services. Thirdly, we need to understand more fully the implications of globalization for ageing and older persons. Initially, we see among these the need for lifelong education and consumer protection to enable older persons to cope with the rapid changes and demands of increasingly interdependent economies and societies. These areas require cooperation among nations.

Finally, we reiterate our belief in the benefit of learning from each other's experiences. While countries experience demographic transition differently, and while the strategies of one country cannot be adopted by another indiscriminately, there is much to learn from each other in helping older persons live more meaningful and rewarding lives beyond 1999, the International Year of Older Persons, and into the next century.

Mr. Kiselev (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: It is a great honour for me to participate in the plenary meetings of the General Assembly devoted to such a topical subject as the situation of older persons.

We agree with the assertion that respect and concern for older persons have always, and everywhere, been an abiding sign of human civilization. Despite their age people of the older generation are a constant source of the joy of life and social optimism. They guarantee moral and cultural values and are an example of a humanitarian attitude to life and self-sacrifice for their families and society as a whole.

The decision of the General Assembly to proclaim 1999 the International Year of Older Persons immediately found a positive response in the Russian Federation, where the proportion of people of pensionable age is 20 per cent. In the near future this proportion will grow. We view the observance of the International Year of Older Persons in Russia as an important stage in the State's activities in the interests of the older generation, one opening up new opportunities for improving the situation of older persons and enhancing their role in the social, economic and cultural life of the country.

For the successful observance of the International Year of Older Persons, the President of the Russian Federation and the Government adopted appropriate decisions, set up an organizational committee and approved the basic events of the Year. Similar measures were implemented in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

Events within the International Year of Older Persons in Russia are taking place against the backdrop of constant additional measures that are being taken by the Government to enhance legal guarantees, to reform the pension system, to improve health care and supplies of medicines, to develop the network of social services for senior citizens and to enhance services in the social, cultural and educational fields. A special federal programme for 1997-1999 entitled "The Senior generation" is being carried out for 1997-1999 with a clear social orientation. Its implementation has been extended by the Russian Government to the year 2000. Practical activities in the interests of older persons are based on the achievements of the Russia's gerontology, which has a history going back more than 40 years and which has made a considerable contribution to the elaboration of new methods to care for older people.

The observance of the International Year of Older Persons in the Russian region has entailed practical events designed to mitigate the negative effects of ageing and the resultant individual and group problems. These events, which

show how we care for older persons, also include ceremonial and festive rallies, information and propaganda events and cultural and international events. The strategy of holding events under the International Year of Older Persons in many regions has been developed on the basis of special sociological research.

Work relating to the International Year and a conceptual base have received understanding and support from Russian non-governmental organizations and the media. They are showing increased willingness to involve older persons in social-oriented activities and take into account the needs of older readers and radio and television audiences. More diversified information is being provided about various aspects of the situation of senior citizens.

Particular attention during the Year was paid to the dissemination and implementation of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons in order to add life to their years, not just years to their lives. In implementing the Principles, the Russian Federation is attempting to find optimal solutions to socio-economic, family, household, psychological and many other problems of the elderly and to create conditions for a healthy, safe and dignified old age.

Monitoring the situation of the older generation has revealed the presence of three common problems of the elderly citizens of Russia: worsening health, low income and loneliness. The specific situation of older Russians today is that the objective social risks associated with the onset of old age are made worse given the transitional state of our economy.

We in Russia have felt with particular acuteness how difficult it is to find an optimal model for the transition to market conditions. The Russian Government is doing everything it can to ease for the elderly the social costs of last year's economic and financial crisis as much as possible. Now that we have managed to implement priority measures to resolve this crisis situation — curbing inflation, ensuring relative stability of our currency, preventing a catastrophic slump in production — the job of improving living standards and quality of life, including for people of pensionable age, has once again come to the fore.

Pursuant to the tasks assigned by the President of the Russian Federation and the Government, urgent measures are being taken to raise pensions and to carry out pension reform. We are planning to develop in the near future a concept for a State social policy for older persons for the period up to 2005, which will implement the ideas of a society for people of all ages.

Today the provisions of agreed United Nations documents that directly call on the United Nations system organizations and international financial institutions to provide support to economies in transition and to implement policies to improve the system of social welfare, including for elderly citizens, are as relevant as ever before. In our view, United Nations funds and programmes should pay more attention to the situation of older people when working out technical assistance projects for countries in transition. Specific areas of cooperation in this field could be the training of specialists in social and socio-cultural services for older people, working out recommendations to improve the pension system and an exchange of scientific information on the achievements of fundamental and applied gerontology. We hope that all these questions will be considered, and taken into account during the review of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The observance of the International Year of Older Persons under the auspices of the United Nations will definitely give a new impetus to our efforts to guarantee a happy old age and longevity for those to whom we owe our lives, education and basis for social development. The continuity of generations should never be interrupted. Older men and women are the keepers of invaluable life experience. Our care, assistance and responsibility for the destiny of our older fellow citizens will inspire them with courage and patience and give them strength for further life. By showing true love reinforced with care and understanding to older persons we, through our common efforts, are establishing the basis of a future society and giving it timeless humane values, which will help us respond in a fitting manner to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Mr. Powles (New Zealand): New Zealand welcomed the designation of 1999 by the United Nations as the International Year of older Persons. older people around the world contribute to the diversity and richness of our societies and communities. The International Year has been a time to celebrate and value that contribution. It has also been an opportunity to improve understanding between generations, as well as our understanding of the impact of growing ageing populations on societies around the world.

In New Zealand, the International Year has provided an important opportunity to build on the standards set by the International Plan of Action on Ageing. The fundamental principles of the year - independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity - flow from the respect any society should hold for its older people. New Zealand has

worked to incorporate these principles into our International Year activities.

New Zealand's theme for the International Year has been "Valuing Older People". Our objectives, which flowed from this theme, were two-fold: to promote positive attitudes to ageing and older people and to prepare for an ageing population. The Year has provided a focus for older people to demonstrate the many ways in which they participate and contribute to the community. Media interest in activities undertaken during the Year has assisted in raising the profile of older people and increasing knowledge about continuing opportunities for community involvement in older age.

Activities during the International Year of Older Persons in New Zealand were structured around three dates during the Year, each with its own theme. The first was 1 February, focusing on valuing the contributions of older people and productive ageing. This date coincided with the removal of an upper-age limit in New Zealand's human rights legislation, thereby prohibiting discrimination in the workplace on the basis of age. Two national conferences were held to examine the effects of these legislative changes and issues for older people in the workplace. The focus around this time was on productive ageing and valuing the contributions of older people.

On 15 May, further activities for the International Year focused on the theme of valuing relationships between young and old. The fifteenth of May is also the United Nations International Day of Families, providing an opportunity to reinforce the Government's commitment to strengthening families and valuing the role of older people in the family/*whanau*. Activities in May had an inter-generational focus. The main event was the launch of the LinkAge handbook for developing and maintaining inter-generational programmes. The handbook has been distributed to every primary and secondary school in New Zealand and to over 300 older people's and other community organizations.

Finally, on 1 October New Zealand celebrated the United Nations International Day of older Persons with activities focusing on the value of older people. The day was marked throughout New Zealand by local celebrations, displays and events, including New Zealand's contribution to the World Health Organization's Global Embrace. The Tower Senior Achievers' Awards, which recognize the contributions of older volunteers, were presented by our Governor-General at Government House in Wellington.

The New Zealand Government supported projects with a focus on positive ageing through funding to 24 community organizations throughout New Zealand. A communication strategy was undertaken aimed at increasing awareness about positive ageing and the ways in which older people do, and can continue to, contribute to the community. The Government has produced and distributed over 20,000 information kits since October 1998 to organizations throughout New Zealand. A Web site was established to provide information about the national strategy for the Year, including the key dates and themes and ideas for involvement.

An important component of this Year's observance has been the work of volunteer community coordinators in locations throughout New Zealand. These volunteers, recruited through older people's and Maori organizations, played a significant role in promoting the Year and encouraging activities in their local community.

Funding was also provided for a specific research project to investigate and identify factors which allow older people to remain independent. The research will provide recommendations for policy and service delivery.

Feedback from local communities suggests that one of the most significant outcomes from the International Year of Older Persons has been the development of new and positive relationships between different groups working together on projects and activities during the Year. It is expected that these relationships will strengthen in the future, building on the positive achievements of the Year.

My Government appreciates the support and information which has been regularly provided by the United Nations programme on ageing and, in particular, by its Director and Coordinator of the International Year of Older Persons, Alexandre Sidorenko. We congratulate the Director and his team on their fine efforts over the Year.

By valuing the contribution of older persons we empower them to play a productive and fulfilling role in our societies. We can all build on the positive achievements of the Year to continue to promote positive attitudes to ageing and older people and to ensure that the needs of our ageing populations can be met.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): All of us gain a lot by an extended lifetime: the young are offered a chance to grow old and the old to grow older. From everybody's point of view, demographic ageing is not a curse, but a blessing in disguise. It falls on us all to make the most of these new opportunities. Therefore, my country warmly welcomes this debate to explore together the nature and scope of

demographic ageing throughout the world and the impact it has on the individual, the family and society, as well as on economies and cultures.

My Government also strongly appreciates the efforts of the United Nations programme in preparing for the Year with the underlying theme of "A society for all ages", as well as the report of the Secretary-General presented in document A/54/268, which is central to this important issue.

As a legacy of the commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons and its innumerable activities, greater recognition has been achieved as to the far-reaching implications of demographic change throughout the world. This has led to a widespread progression from a negative view of older persons as a burden to society to a more positive perception of them as active participants whose life experience can significantly contribute to a better world.

The Republic of Croatia has also experienced a significant increase in older persons. According to the 1991 census, over 13 per cent of the population of Croatia was older than 60 years of age. However, as distinguished from other countries in which similar demographic trends were identified, Croatia faced this trend under specific conditions of economic transition complicated by the impact of war.

In addressing this challenge, a wide range of activities have begun nationally in observance of the Year, commencing with the establishment of a national committee at the beginning of 1999. In the context of commemorating the International Year of Older Persons, the national committee organized a conference focusing on the definition of goals for the strategic development of caring for older persons in the Republic of Croatia. A set of national principles was drawn up reflecting the 18 United Nations Principles for Older Persons. These recommendations outline policy development for older persons, including proposals for inaugurating a wide array of projects and activities.

Of all the recommendations that were made by the National Committee, I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the following: the establishment of long-term mechanisms to monitor the interrelationship between aging and social and economic development; social care policies envisaged for creating an enabling environment allowing full participation and integration of older persons into society, through the provision of quality care, including health care, and access to appropriate housing facilities; measures for rural development directed at changing the trend between depopulation and ageing in certain areas by encouraging multi-generation activities.

The experience of Croatia, where the elderly constitute 20 per cent of the total number of displaced persons as a result of war, clearly demonstrates that special attention must be paid to the protection of elderly people, in addition to the protection of women, children and other vulnerable groups. Given the particular situation of Croatia, special attention has been given to older persons who are internally displaced or returnees, to facilitate their return and to enable them to resume their independent way of life.

There is no doubt that in the twenty-first century we will live longer. Whether the extension of our lifespan will be accompanied by an increase or a decrease in the quality of life for all people will depend on the quality of our preparations for this fundamental demographic and social change. It is a huge task for all of us, from the United Nations to Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Investing in human development throughout our entire lifetime and supporting age-integrated social institutions are not only good ideas; they are the prerequisites for the society for all ages that all of us want to be a part of in the twenty-first century.

Ms. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan): I have the honour to address this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons.

Like many of the previous speakers, my delegation attaches great importance to this issue. In 1982 the General Assembly endorsed the International Plan of Action on Ageing and subsequently the Assembly, in its resolution 46/91, adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. This was an unprecedented and important step by the international community towards providing a broad framework for action on ageing and encouraging national Governments to incorporate these Principles into their national programmes. The Principles have made a significant contribution to improving the status of older persons worldwide and to their participation in the formulation of policies that directly affect their well-being.

The General Assembly, in order to further implement the International Plan of Action and promote adherence to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, designated the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. The Secretary-General, launching the International Year on 1 October 1998 at the United Nations Headquarters, emphasized the appropriateness of this event on the eve of the new millennium to facilitate mainstreaming older

persons' concerns and encourage activities within a long-term perspective.

Today, the United Nations has become decisively involved in this area. The report of the Secretary-General provides an in-depth analysis of what has been done by the United Nations system and national Governments to implement General Assembly resolution 53/109.

My delegation notes with great satisfaction the work of the United Nations programme on ageing, which has extended its exploration of the roles, opportunities and contributions of older persons in fast-changing societies. We consider it important that the United Nations programme is engaged in the ongoing formulation of a policy framework for a society for all ages. For my delegation, it is also important that the still-evolving policy framework encompasses four aspects: the situation of older persons, lifelong individual development, multi-generational relationships in families and communities, and the macro-societal implications of ageing. These four facets have given rise to a proactive and positive exploration of ageing in the context of its influence on the socio-economic and cultural landscape of society.

For my Government, improving the quality of life of its population, including older people, is a high priority. Kazakhstan has made significant progress towards the implementation of the action plans of the global United Nations conferences through the development of a socio-economic policy framework to foster sustainable economic growth. One of the main tasks it faces today is to create a broad and reliable system of protection of the socio-economic health of our population.

"Kazakhstan 2030", a presidential programme designed to move the country into the next millennium, formulates strategies to stimulate population growth and to further improve the health and well-being of all citizens. The programme provides for an increase in the longevity of the population through the promotion of healthy lifestyles which would help to reduce preventable diseases and substance abuse.

The National Plan of Action was elaborated by my Government in order to achieve the objectives of the International Year. The Plan contained concrete measures to offer older people an opportunity to enjoy a broad range of benefits, including medical care and old-age pensions. Practically all of our regions drew up their own action programmes. A media campaign promoting the theme "A society for all ages" covered the questions of the relationship between an individual and society; older people's involvement in social life; the maintenance of their dignity, creativity and spirituality; and the promotion of healthy lifestyles and lifelong health improvement. The observance of the International Year of Older Persons in Kazakhstan has undoubtedly raised the awareness of our society in terms of the involvement and integration of older people at all levels.

We cannot speak about the issue of the elderly without reference to population ageing, a phenomenon that impacts greatly on socio-economic policies. According to the Population Division of the Secretariat's Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the part of my country's population aged 60 years or older will have more than doubled by 2050. In the light of the rapid ageing of the population and the projected demographic shifts extending into the next century, we strongly believe that this important issue will gain even greater significance in the coming years.

We also believe that in order to adjust our societies to a new reality, the international community will have to comprehensively address the legal, fiscal, financial and labour implications of ageing. In this regard, I would like to remind the Assembly that the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly, held this year on the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, also reflected the view that the early stabilization of the world population would make a crucial contribution to realizing the objective of sustainable development.

In my delegation's view, we have been able to achieve the objective of the International Year of Older Persons in raising the awareness of the fast-changing demographic picture of older people globally and in promoting action strategies to improve their integration into economic and cultural life. The role of the United Nations and its agencies is vital in this regard. Let us therefore jointly support them through our actions.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

United Nations A/54/PV.25

General Assembly

Official Records

Fifty-fourth session

25th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 6 October 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 106 *(continued)*

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family: follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.6)

The President: I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 5 October 1999 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the Assembly hear a statement by the observer of the Holy See at its plenary meetings devoted to this item.

Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal that the Assembly hear the observer of the Holy See?

It was so decided.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Older persons are an indispensable pillar of any society. They represent the history of a nation and the essence of its experience. That experience gives rise to the rebirth of peoples and nations and to the building of civilizations, and consequently to that of human civilization as a whole. In recognition of this, the General Assembly declared 1999 the International Year of Older Persons. We praise the work that went into the report before the Assembly in document A/54/268, entitled "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies".

Here we must stress the fact that not all societies or communities experience problems relating to the elderly. Such problems can vary depending on the prevailing family and societal relationships in those communities, and on the cultural and religious education they provide.

The State of Kuwait has always devoted attention and interest to the elderly; it has always cared for them because they played a pioneering role in the establishment of modern Kuwait and in the preservation of its structure. Islam prescribes that older people must be given special care; it commands Muslims to be gracious and kind to them and to remove all difficulties and impediments from their surroundings. God Almighty has declared:

> "Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents." [The Holy Koran, XVIII:23]

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

The Kuwaiti constitution provides for care for all citizens in old age, in ill health and in disability, through the provision of social security and health care services. A ministerial decision issued in 1998 established a supreme advisory committee to draw up plans for visiting home care for the elderly; that committee is responsible for supervising the project and laying the foundations of a successful policy on older persons. This important accomplishment reflects the increasing interest of the State of Kuwait in older persons; it is typical of the support we provide for older persons and reflects their status in Kuwaiti society. We provide home care for older people through social workers instead of placing them in homes for the elderly; our older people receive excellent care and services.

The care of older people is basic to Kuwaiti social care services, which receive constant support from the State. We provide a variety of services and kinds of care. For instance, the State provides nursing homes and day care, including home care. In short, we provide older people with all kinds of services, programmes and activities in their homes, making use of trained specialists. The life expectancy of Kuwaiti citizens has increased; for women it has reached 74, and for men 72, thanks to State services and care for the elderly.

Parallel with the United Nations commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons, Kuwait established a national committee to prepare for the Year. The activities of our commemoration include round-table discussions and scientific seminars on all matters relating to older persons, including professional, psychological, health and social issues, and leisure activities for older persons; conducting a field study to collect data on cases of diseases or chronic ailments in older persons in hospitals and evaluating all questions relating to them and finding the necessary solutions; honouring the first generation of older persons, who contributed to the rebirth of our country; training the providers of care to older persons in nursing homes and hospitals, with a view to improving the quality of care; organizing a mass media campaign to promote the new system of care for older persons, namely the mobile in-home care services, through a comprehensive, centralized and specialized working group for the provision of care to older persons at home in full coordination with their families.

The project aims at preserving the dignity of older persons, providing care and services at home and solving their social and psychological problems. We provide nursing and hospital services, family guidance regarding balanced nutrition, leisure and recreational means, and all medical appliances and equipment needed by the elderly.

As we approach the dawn of the twenty-first century, I cannot but pay homage to the United Nations General Assembly for declaring 1999 the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme "A society for all ages", since at the beginning of 2002, older persons will constitute 25 per cent of the total population of the developing countries, which will have a profound effect on their social and economic development.

Mr. Chandraprasert (Thailand): It is an honour and a pleasure for me to participate in this plenary meeting of the General Assembly to give a brief report on Thailand's observance of the International Year of Older Persons. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies", which highlights the achievements made during this important Year in promoting the welfare of older persons.

In Thailand, those who are 60 years old or over are regarded as older persons. Today older persons make up about 8.9 per cent of our population, or 5.5 million individuals. It is estimated that within the next decade, this figure will increase to between 7 million and 8 million as a result of significant progress in health care and medical technology.

The problems facing Thailand's older persons are wide-ranging. Whether in the areas of health, income, housing or accessibility to social services, these problems have a strong impact on older persons and pose significant challenges to society in dealing with them. The situation has been compounded by the transformation of the family unit in past decades, from the extended family to the nuclear family, which has further increased the demands on government to take care of older persons.

How are the challenges being met? Fortunately for Thailand, older persons are highly revered in our society. Our traditional culture encourages young people to respect and care for older persons. This traditional culture goes some way towards alleviating the problems faced by older persons.

Furthermore, the Government and non-governmental organizations have implemented preventive and protective programmes for older persons, in accordance with the

guidelines of the World Assembly on Ageing, convened in Vienna in 1982. The National Committee on the Elderly was appointed in 1982, and in the same year, 13 April of each year was declared National Ageing Day. The Government has also encouraged every province throughout the country to establish a club for the elderly where older persons can come together to organize activities for themselves and society at large. At present, there are more than 3,000 older persons' clubs in Thailand. In 1989 these clubs agreed to set up the Senior Citizens Council of Thailand, which acts as the coordinating body of all associations and clubs for older persons, including governmental and non-governmental organizations, within the country.

Policies to support the elderly are integrated into the national policy. They are in line with three national master plans, namely, the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001), the National Long-Term Policies and Measures on Older Persons (1992-2011) and the Third National Social Welfare and Social Work Development Plan (1997-2001). On the basis of these three national master plans, the Government will undertake the following to help foster the well-being of older persons: promoting health care knowledge, expanding basic social services, encouraging the transfer of experience from older to younger persons, promoting the value of reciprocal family obligation, supporting preferred religious and moral values, subsidizing service provision by communities and non-governmental organizations, increasing the training of service providers for older persons and promoting data compilation, research and project evaluation.

In observance of the 1999 International Year of Older Persons, the Department of Public Welfare, under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, has been designated the national focal point to arrange activities to celebrate the Year. In organizing activities to mark this event, we have adhered to our belief in the principle that older persons are both contributors to and recipients of benefits from society, a principle widely recognized by the United Nations and the international community.

On this basis, the National Committee on the International Year of Older Persons, chaired by Mr. Chuan Leekpai, Prime Minister of Thailand, has launched a programme of activities nationwide with the participation of the Government, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and, most importantly, older persons. The following activities are some of the highlights of the programme.

First, the Government launched Thailand's International Year of Older Persons at the Government House, chaired by the Prime Minister, before the week of National Ageing Day and National Family Day.

Secondly, the Declaration on Thailand's Older Persons was adopted by the Government, non-governmental organizations and public and social institutions to affirm commitments and obligations to better the quality of life and to promote and protect the rights of older persons.

Thirdly, the Government has set up the National Coordinating Body on Older Persons, under the Office of the Prime Minister, to be responsible for formulating policies and strategies and promoting continued and efficient coordination of affairs relating to older persons among concerned agencies.

Fourthly, forums of older persons have been arranged nationwide in the four regions for older persons to share their opinions on and attitudes towards social issues. These views serve as valuable inputs for the formulation of plans and policies for older persons in the future.

In Thailand religious institutions have played and continue to play an important role in moulding the Thai people's way of life and shaping attitudes towards compassion. Therefore, the Thai Government has been encouraging people in the community to set up citizens' organizations to manage social service centres for older persons in the community's temples throughout the country. These centres should act as the central implementing mechanisms in local areas for social services for older persons, as places where all older persons would be able to get the appropriate services from Government and non-governmental organizations. Activities organized by such community-based centres would benefit people of all ages in the community as well.

In organizing the celebration in Thailand of the International Year of Older Persons, we found to our pleasure that Thai people and various organizations are paying more attention to older persons, and they joined in activities organized both in Bangkok and in regional areas. People of all ages recognize the importance of older persons and are paying them more respect and caring for them. Older persons themselves have shown their capabilities as contributors to society by passing on their experience to the younger generations.

To build on this momentum, the Government of Thailand has formulated the following policy guidelines to assist older persons in the future. First, non-governmental organizations, foundations, associations and civil society are to be supported and encouraged to help older persons by extending access to services in rural areas. Second, as soon as possible an older person's law is to be enacted. Third, communities and societies are to be encouraged to recognize the problems of older persons. Fourth, the awareness of families and communities about how to care for older persons is to be increased by emphasizing relationships and mutual support among extended family members. Fifth, the coordinating mechanisms on ageing are to be strengthened. Sixth, a second long-term plan for older persons is to be formulated. Seventh, research studies on the elderly are to be encouraged. Eight, access to social services for older persons nationwide is to be provided by dispatching mobile units to reach older persons in communities and rural areas.

In conclusion, I would like to assure all members of the Assembly that Thailand's national economic and social development plan and the policy guidelines of organizations concerned will provide continued support for and attach high priority to the family institution, of which older persons are indeed valuable and useful assets. After all, older persons are not only the link to our past, the embodiment of our living cultural heritage, but are indeed also the repository of the collective wisdom from which our society draws as we make important decisions about our present and future.

Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine): The International Year of Older Persons comes at a time when we are witnessing a continuous increase in older persons as a proportion of the total population. In absolute terms, the number of older persons is increasing by a million per year. The world is actually seeing itself greying, demographically speaking.

This enormous growth will continue well into the twenty-first century. Statistics show that in a few generations average life expectancy could rise by another 20 years. So the population of the world is ageing.

Political developments, industrialization and advanced technologies have brought immense benefits to most of humanity — but not to all. It should, therefore, be our common goal to build a community for all generations. The International Year of Older Persons has provided an opportunity for Government decision-makers, researchers, practitioners, non-governmental organizations, community associations and the public at large to focus specifically on the status of older persons.

During this year, as we see from the Secretary-General's report (A/54/268), Governments have taken noticeable practical steps to improve the living conditions of the elderly. Now we have an opportunity to make a brief review of the progress that has been made in this area. The exchange of information and experience at the international level can effectively promote the elaboration of further long-term initiatives and strategies on ageing.

In this context, our delegation welcomes the extensive work done in this sphere by the United Nations programme on ageing and, in particular, by its director, the Coordinator of the International Year of Older Persons, Alexandre Sidorenko, our countryman. We hope that this team will successfully continue its useful work.

Let me now touch briefly on the situation in Ukraine. Like many other countries, Ukraine is experiencing the rapid ageing of its population. The current demographic situation is characterized by an increase in the number of people aged over 60. In 1960 they amounted to 13.8 per cent of the total population of Ukraine; by 1996 this figure had reached 18.6 per cent. By 2015 we expect it to reach 22 per cent. This process causes difficulties connected with general problems of our country's economic development: labour resources; the structure of medical, social and other services; financial support for older persons; their status in the family and society; the interrelationship between generations; and so forth.

In order to solve these problems the Government of Ukraine has taken practical steps aimed at promoting older people's lifelong development and well-being by launching comprehensive national programmes of actions to be carried out during the International Year of Older Persons and afterwards. These programmes combine the efforts of governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations and academic institutions.

In practical terms, we have increased pension benefits and started pension-insurance reforms. The national programme to eradicate poverty among the elderly has become an important instrument in bringing the income level of the elderly closer to the national average, which is being done by means of increased special and regular benefits.

Under the national programme to promote the health of elderly people, the Government of Ukraine has strengthened existing institutions and established new ones, thereby providing improved medical assistance to these persons. The programme is also intended to provide the elderly with the maximum possible social benefits; encourage increased productivity, improve service quality and guarantee distribution of rehabilitation resources and other goods; and improve existing attitudes with regard to the elderly. The Government has provided the elderly with free and unrestricted access to medical assistance, and continues to enact legislation granting them health care privileges. The programme facilitated the improvement of the coordination of the activities of central and local state authorities, as well as those of enterprises, organizations and unions dealing with different aspects of the problem of the elderly.

Among other measures, the Government and local authorities have established policies that promote the production of food and other necessities for the elderly. In addition, the Government of Ukraine provides special social services for the elderly, with a particular focus on the disabled.

In Ukraine the problem of the elderly is also viewed from the gender perspective. In this connection, I would like to point out an important feature that has developed in our country over the last decade. In Ukraine the difference between the average lifespan of men and women has substantially increased, to the point where the average lifespan of women is now about 12 years longer. Hence, the ratio of older women is steadily growing. At the same time, statistics show that women are poorer than men in old age and more often need extra medical attention.

Without going deep into the underlying causes of this phenomenon, it is worth mentioning that this circumstance prompted our Government to undertake a number of extra measures in order to adjust the system of health care and medical services for the elderly, as well as the work of numerous social institutions, to meet the needs of the increasing number of women among the elderly. While this adjustment process is still in progress, it is now clear that it requires additional funds and resources, which are in deficit in a country with its economy in transition. Nevertheless, we will continue to take steps aimed at finding an effective solution to this problem.

Recent developments in our demographic situation have raised fundamental questions regarding an adequate policy towards older persons and highlighted the need for new approaches in this domain. Of course, the provision of social security and similar conventional services and benefits is of great importance. At the same time, it would not, perhaps, suffice to change the situation for the better in any important way.

We must therefore continue both the provision of care and income security and the pursuit of strategies to protect the rights of this group of people. In doing so, we should take decisive action in order to move towards a society of policies focused on self-help and independence of the elderly, in which they would become active members of society.

In this regard, Ukraine welcomes the series of important initiatives of the United Nations Secretariat to support the development of the long-term perspective strategy on ageing, including convening in the year 2002 a conference to review the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing. We also support the proposal to revise the 20-year old Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, to adapt it to the changing conditions and adjust it to meet new challenges. We hope that adequate resources will also be provided for this purpose.

Old age is the future of us all and by creating new opportunities for the elderly and more favourable conditions of life for the aged, we are thinking first of all of ourselves. The rhetorical question written almost two centuries ago by the famous English poet George Lord Byron — "What is the worst of woes that wait on Age?" — should be left in the past.

Mr. Balanandan (India): Let me begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation for the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the International Year of Older Persons. We are particularly pleased at the scientific approach taken for the further follow-up of issues related to ageing. We thank the Government of Spain for its offer to host a second world assembly on ageing in 2002.

We believe that ageing should not be looked upon as a problem that societies must face. We need not be alarmed by the process of what is termed the "greying" of societies. This is a natural phenomenon which calls for societal adjustments and reorientation in which everybody can contribute productively for the ultimate benefit of mankind. I would venture to say that, more than a society for all ages, what we need to work for is an encompassing society for all mankind in which the young and the old, the strong and the weak, the able and the

disabled, the child and the parent each obtain equal opportunities for productive contribution, enhanced human relations and fulfilment of aspirations.

We do not believe in the stereotype of age. We do not believe that a human being is antique when old and a novelty when young. The eminent philosopher and second President of India, Mr. S. Radhakrishnan, said:

> "We do not grow old by living a certain number of years. We grow old if we lose our ideals, if we become immune to change. Years may wrinkle the skin; the soul is wrinkled if we give up love and loyalty. Whether we are 20 or 70, we are young as long as we have in our heart the spirit of wonder, of curiosity, the challenge to life and the joy of adventure."

My country's view of age is therefore based not on a numerical addition of years, but on an integrated process of learning through experience. This has been enunciated in our civilization through two composites: knowledge and abilities. Constant improvement in both leads to a productive compact called *jeevana* — life which is neither young nor old but a continuum of actions. In our philosophy we do not go by the years of survival, but by our contribution — by whether what we have done survives after us. We do not segment by the hourglass; we do not fragment life into years. It is this life-oriented view of age that prompts us to look at plans and programmes for the elderly as an integrated whole in which lifelong individual development is fostered.

While this view of society has influenced all our development activities, a stronger integration of age in our policies was introduced in the early 1990s through a number of affirmative actions. We started a scheme in 1992 to promote the welfare of the aged through a nationwide network of non-governmental organizations. The Government provides direct financial assistance to non-governmental organizations and other voluntary organizations to set up and run day-care centres, old age homes, mobile medicare and non-institutional services. These services are rendered to pensioners and to persons above 60 years who are from the non-formal sector. Ninety per cent of the expenditures borne by the non-governmental organizations come from government grants and the balance is raised through contributions and donations. In tribal areas, the Government grant is 95 per cent. Voluntary organizations financed by the Government appoint social workers to help the elderly in legal, banking and tax matters. In addition, they are helped to get access to special medical facilities. Between 1992 and 1998, the Government of India spent an equivalent of $10 million on this scheme.

In 1997, we also embarked upon a scheme through the grass-roots administrative system of the village councils, aiming to establish at least one old-age home per district throughout the country. To assist in their construction, the Government has been granting an equivalent of $12,000 for each unit. We do realize, however, that much more needs to be done and are formulating a national policy for older persons, which should be completed soon.

Whatever we do at the "macro" level of policies to improve the life of the individual, such policies are rooted in and grow from the value systems of each society. The last 200 years have seen the release of vast productive capacities, bringing with them great changes in social mores and values. In particular, rural-urban displacements have helped bring down the old order of family values and replace it with a society oriented to self and not community. But, as we move into the next century and a new millennium — when, according to the Secretary-General's report (A/54/268), one in every five persons in the world will be an older person — let us consciously reorient our thinking of life: one integrated whole, not age-denominated partitions. Productive endeavours at later stages in life, greater interpersonal co-relations through new communication technologies, a better and greener environment, greater freedom to travel and see other civilizations — all those will make life richer and worth living.

Ms. Viken (Norway): The International Year of Older Persons 1999 has been warmly welcomed both by the Norwegian Government and by the Norwegian non-governmental organizations. The International Year, on the eve of the millennium, has been a significant event for demonstrating the importance of older peoples' contribution to and potential in our societies and the benefits of active and healthy ageing.

How Norway has marked the Year has been coordinated by a national committee, with members from the Government and from the non-governmental organization sector. The chairman is the Minister of Social Affairs. The main focus has been on the situation of older persons, lifelong learning and solidarity between generations. Cooperation with the Baltic States and north-west Russia and the situation of older persons there have also been priority issues.

The Norwegian Government highlighted the international dimension of the International Year by hosting a conference in Oslo on participation by older persons. The conference drew participants from the Nordic countries, the Baltic countries, Russia and the European Commission, and also from many European non-governmental organizations. Two elements played a central role in this seminar: senior-citizen councils and voluntary work. I believe that both elements can be key factors in increasing participation by older persons.

The main ambition of the Norwegian national committee, however, has been to stimulate activities at regional and local levels in my country. Grants have been made available for innovative, inter-organizational projects. The partner non-governmental organizations in the International Year have made substantial efforts to stimulate activities for and with older persons. Among the most successful projects in terms of creating solidarity between generations is cooperation between schools and activity centres for older persons on information technology. One of the main national events that took place during the Year has been an "older people's week", which included a broad range of activities by and for older persons. The Year was brought to a successful end at a televised gala performance on 1 October. Her Majesty the Queen, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Social Affairs and 900 people from all over Norway attended the performance.

The main challenge now is to follow up the attention and ambitions created by the International Year. Our focus on this issue should remain in line with the 1991 United Nations Principles for Older Persons (General Assembly resolution 46/91, annex). Older persons should remain integrated within society, be perceived as a resource, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that affect their well-being and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations. Being old does not necessarily mean being sick and helpless, as the Norwegian sociologist, Professor Gunhild Hagestad, pointed out in her keynote address at the launching of the International Year here at the United Nations on 1 October last year; the promotion of active ageing should be a cornerstone of our future efforts.

Let me say a few words about the challenges we face in Norway. The most important task will be to increase our capacity for providing care for frail older persons. The Norwegian Government has embarked on an ambitious four-year plan to improve the care of older persons. The core objectives of the plan are to provide nursing and care services which ensure that the elderly live secure, worthy and independent lives, to ensure that elderly persons can live in their own homes or in sheltered housing for as long as possible, and to provide sufficient capacity to ensure that services are available when and where needed.

The tight labour market in Norway and the demographic developments ahead make it necessary to prevent too early retirement from the labour force. To the benefit of retired persons, the Norwegian Government has recently implemented a significant increase in the minimum pension.

Norway strongly supports the increased participation of the United Nations system in ageing-related events and research. We welcome the attention of both the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women to the issues of the social integration and participation of older persons. The special sessions of the General Assembly next year in connection with the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women will surely expand on these efforts. Furthermore, the activities of the United Nations funds and programmes in the ageing and development area are proving instrumental in the follow-up to the International Year. In its development cooperation work, Norway gives high priority to the social sector, including support for basic health services. Primary health care targets vulnerable groups, including older persons.

I feel confident that we can all learn from each other in the follow-up to the International Year. I also feel confident that the United Nations will remain a useful platform in this respect, as well as in connection with the International Year of Volunteers in 2001.

We must all make an effort to be prepared for the new millennium with policies and solutions capable of fulfilling the objectives of the International Year of Older Persons. We all have a responsibility to contribute to the creation of a genuine society for all ages in all countries.

Mrs. Aponte de Zacklin (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Venezuela fully supports the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and is pleased to join in the expressions of gratitude to Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez for her extraordinary contribution to policies benefiting older persons.

Venezuela is also very pleased to participate in the commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme "Towards a society for all ages".

The great international interest in the question of ageing is clearly shown by the activities which have been carried out to attain the objective of creating "a society for all ages", a society that, as the Secretary-General has said, does not characterize the elderly as pensioners, but regards them as both agents and beneficiaries of development.

In the final decades of the twentieth century the "silent revolution" began — in other words, the rapid ageing of the population and the uncontrollable demographic changes that will extend into the next millennium. Although ageing is a global phenomenon, its rate of increase has been faster in developing countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean, demographic statistics from the Caribbean centre with responsibility in that field indicate that the proportion of those over 60 in the population increased from 6 per cent to 7.9 per cent in the last decade, and will rise again over the next 25 years, to 14 per cent.

Another significant fact, according to Martha Peláez, regional adviser on ageing and health of the Pan American Health Organization, is that in countries throughout the world, ageing is above all a question of gender, and the Latin America and Caribbean region is no exception. However, in this region the situation is characterized by widespread levels of poverty that make women more vulnerable as a result, *inter alia*, of their greater inability to acquire economic resources. Thus, it is important that policies designed to deal with questions of the ageing of the population at the global level take into account the specific needs of women, but it is important also to make sure that the policies adopted for developing countries be very different from those which are appropriate in developed countries.

The Government of Venezuela, through its long-term programme, the Bolivar Plan 2000 and the Economic Transition Programme 1999-2000, is consolidating the conditions for an economy favouring social justice and thus benefiting all social groups. To commemorate the International Year of Older Persons, Venezuela's National Institute of Geriatrics and Gerontology (INAGER), our main body dealing with older persons, held a programme of activities. These included the first days for the modernization of geriatric therapy, for more than a hundred doctors working in geriatric and gerontological units of INAGER, held in Caracas from 30 September to 2 October. I would also like to mention the Week of Older Persons, arranged in cooperation with the country's most important non-governmental organizations.

Within the framework of social action, coordinated efforts are being made by the Government and civil society to achieve the common well-being of all members of Venezuelan society. In this connection, and in connection with the goals related to dealing with older persons in the family, the basic unit of social organization, we feel it relevant to mention the ideas expressed by the First Lady of the Republic in her statement at the United Nations to commemorate the International Day of Families, which included the need to strengthen families through promoting the repositioning of the family as an instrument for improving the world and life.

Another idea was that the unity of children, adults and the elderly, irrespective of the connections and the characteristics of the home that bring them together, has a potential that is not always seen by social action organizations and their methods and that this comes within the concept of "a society for all ages".

Ageing, seen overall, is in its individual dimension a life-long process. Efforts to achieve the social, economic and spiritual well-being of members of society of advanced ages are therefore the concern of everyone and attaining this objective benefits all humanity.

The celebration of the International Year has thus enabled us to think not only about the dialogue between generations in the conceptual framework of "a society for all ages", but also about people's necessary, in-depth, intimate and sincere internal dialogue.

In conclusion, human beings have always hoped to prolong their lives, and this hope has been accompanied by the illusion of eternal youth. These desires are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. We will be eternally young in our hearts if we live with dignity until the end of our days, if we feel useful to society and, in particular, if we can share our individual, unique, singular experience — experience which, however, we have gained from that great universal book entitled "Life".

Mrs. Fritsche (Liechtenstein): The adoption by the General Assembly of the International Plan of Action on Ageing in December 1982 marked the beginning of a new awareness about the ageing process from birth

throughout the life cycle. Since then the questions of promoting active ageing, as well as ensuring fuller participation and better quality of care in old age, have gradually been introduced to the agenda of several United Nations bodies and agencies, culminating in the declaration of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons.

It is of particular relevance to recognize that the longevity revolution is changing the concept of ageing. Over past years, the world's population has continually moved from a state of high birth and death rates to one characterized by low birth and death rates. The number and proportion of older persons has increased at an unprecedented rate. While in 1950 the number of persons aged 60 or older was 200 million, it is today almost 550 million, and in about the year 2020, the world's ageing population will reach 1 billion. It is also expected that the major increase in the world's older persons will occur in the less-developed countries and that women will continue to make up the majority of older persons all over the world.

Extended longevity, which, along with declining fertility, is the universal cause of population ageing, affects both society and individuals. There are many implications for society, including patterns of production, labour market conditions and services required. However, the negative aspects of ageing, such as the increased costs of providing social services and benefits, are often emphasized, while the valuable contribution that older persons can make to society is ignored.

While the majority of older persons continues to lead healthy and productive lives, the risk of dependency grows with increasing age. Traditional support systems for older persons are challenged today. Due to demographic development, the ratio between older persons and available younger family caregivers is declining and traditional family support patterns are eroding. It remains therefore the responsibility of Governments to design policies to provide care for dependent older persons and to support those who provide such care.

In this context it is important to note that women's increased participation in the labour force will inevitably lead to conflicting demands on women who face the double and triple burden of child care, elder care and personal career. The workplace is therefore a critical site for providing assistance to employees who are also caregivers.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/54/268, which highlights some of the activities undertaken on the national level as well as by non-governmental organizations and within the United Nations system. I would like to point out some of the promotional and outreach activities which have taken place or will still take place within the programme for observing and celebrating the International Year of Older Persons in Liechtenstein.

The National Contact and Advisory Committee on Ageing initiated the "Platform for generations", which serves as a multigenerational forum to exchange views on how to achieve a good quality of life regardless of age. The national Association of Older Persons, in cooperation with the national police and a private security company, published a brochure designed to make older persons aware of risks and dangers in daily life and to advise them on preventive measures. The national radio broadcast a programme series between June and September of this year on questions of ageing. The National Contact and Advisory Committee on Ageing is offering courses for people who wish to serve as communicators in a bridging function between generations. In January 2000, an expert meeting will discuss problems of ageing, and participants will include older persons themselves, national care institutions and politicians.

We look back on a century during which people's life expectancy increased dramatically and age structures of societies underwent profound changes. These developments will extend into the coming century and will require further action. We express our hope that "A society for all ages" will become a social reality soon.

In conclusion, I would like to thank in particular Ambassador Julia Alvarez for her valuable contributions in transforming the idea of an International Year of Older Persons into reality, as well as Mr. Aurelio Fernández, Counsellor for Social Affairs at the Permanent Mission of Spain, for his work.

Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland): We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on this important issue, which we think yields important information for Member States, and we concur with its findings.

Icelandic authorities have done their utmost to enhance the visibility of the issues facing the elderly in today's society. An executive committee for the Year of the Elderly was established in Iceland for this purpose, as well as to plan events and projects. The focus of the committee's work was on four main aspects relating to

the elderly: education, economic matters, social affairs and health.

One of the projects was to have a study made on the standard of living and way of life of senior citizens in Iceland including, as far as possible, comparisons with other age groups and other countries. The study was based on data collected during the period 1988 to 1999.

According to the study, poverty has diminished considerably among senior citizens in Iceland during the last ten years. Looking at the senior citizens' way of life, it is evident that in Iceland this group is very active in the labour market and in society in general, compared to neighbouring countries. Senior citizens' participation in the labour market in Iceland is indeed exceptionally high compared to that of other Western societies, indicating that this group is still taking a very active part in society.

Senior citizens follow the mass media, radio and television news programmes, for example, more than younger people. They also read newspapers to a greater extent. They are active in community life and engage in a variety of leisure activities, which is important to prevent exclusion from society.

Senior citizens have a decidedly different outlook on life than younger people. They tend more towards religious observance and are more religious in general. They place more importance on social welfare, have a more positive attitude towards work, are more loyal to employers and have a stronger sense of morality than younger generations.

The conclusions of the study will be used as a basis for future policy-making in matters relating to the elderly.

Finally, we concur with the Secretary-General's recommendations that Governments should expand their approaches to individual ageing, complementing care and security for older persons with measures that promote active participation of the elderly in society.

Mrs. Brobbey (Ghana): The Ghana delegation are honoured to address the General Assembly and to associate ourselves with the statement on the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77.

The United Nations World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982, brought into sharp focus the ageing of the world's population, with its attendant challenges to society. The ageing of the world's population is so rapid that today the population aged 60 years or older is estimated to be nearly 600 million, and it is projected to grow to almost 2 billion by the year 2050, when the population of older persons will be larger than the population of children. However, the increase will be more dramatic in the developing world, where the population aged 60 years or over will grow from 350 million in 1998 to almost 1.6 billion in 2050.

Because of that development, Ghana welcomed the General Assembly's decision in 1992 to observe the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, and the subsequent launching of the Year on 1 October 1998 by the Secretary-General with the theme "A society for all ages". The appropriateness of this theme cannot be overemphasized, given the tendency to neglect the aged and relegate their needs and aspirations to the background, even in societies like ours, where the aged are regarded as repositories of wisdom.

Migration from the rural areas, where the greater proportion of the aged live, has adversely affected the patterns of social interaction and relationships within the traditional family system in Ghana. Consequently, older persons in Ghana are showing signs of loneliness and neglect. We are therefore convinced that a society that caters for all ages, as envisaged by the international community, would indeed tailor its structures, policies and plans to meet the needs and capabilities of all, thereby releasing the potential of all, including the aged, for the benefit of all.

In pursuance of this goal, the Government of Ghana has drafted a national policy on ageing which aims at promoting the social integration of older persons in order to enable them to participate fully in society. Within this context, the Government is committed to the eradication of poverty among older persons and their families through the provision of income-generation and job-creation activities such as the employment of older persons in the teaching of skill development programmes in crafts like pottery and weaving. Income-generating projects targeted at women include employing active older women as childcare providers in daycare centres for children. This policy is designed to differ from conventional arrangements, where the focus is on providing care to older persons, in order to give the latter an opportunity of active involvement in productive social life. It is an important tool to foster intergenerational relationships.

The Government, in collaboration with Help Age Ghana, a non-governmental organization, has established the first daycare centre for older persons and plans to open more centres to share the responsibility for the care of older family members. This policy would encourage continued family support while relieving the family of some of the burdens of caring for the aged.

The Government is also considering substantive tax breaks and subsidies for the support of older persons. This policy is intended to give concessions, relief and encouragement to family members who live and care for the older members of their families, and also to preserve the traditional formal system of social welfare and support, as well as intergenerational relationships. We are, however, aware that a durable solution to the poverty that plagues the aged in our society is to reform our social security system by broadening its scope to take care of the huge percentage of the population in the informal sector, such as petty traders, fishermen and farmers. In this connection, we have included in our policy a lifelong development programme for a better livelihood in the latter stages of the individuals's life. The policy seeks to promote lifelong learning and healthy lifestyles, which, if properly implemented, would offer the youth of today security, autonomy and protection in their old age.

As part of the celebration of the International Year of Older Persons, the Government launched the Year in March with education campaigns throughout the country to raise awareness of the plight of the aged in our society. A programme of interaction between young people and the aged has been put in place by the Government and Help Age Ghana. Schoolchildren visit the aged in their communities on Sundays to either learn from them or help them with their house chores. The Government now offers free medical services to the aged.

The Republic Day of Ghana was declared "Senior Citizens Day", with *durbars* and receptions held in honour of all senior citizens. In this vein, President Jerry Rawlings hosted some senior citizens at a luncheon, where he expressed appreciation for their good work, noting "Without your dedication, Ghana would not be where it is now".

Finally, we hope that the dedication of the international community to the well-being of the aged will be sustained in the next millennium.

Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are pleased to participate in these special meetings of the General Assembly to commemorate the International Year of Older Persons. This Year is due tribute to older persons, who without a doubt make up a valuable sector of society.

We must recognize our historical debt to older persons. Their achievements, successes and lessons have created the society in which we live and are the basis for our own achievements. We must also recognize their current value and their individual dignity, the contributions that they can still make to society, the lessons they can teach us, their extensive experience and wisdom, their compassion and their understanding.

However, we note with concern the particular challenges that older people face and the problems of health and poverty that threaten them. It is therefore necessary to recognize, protect and promote the dignity of older persons and to provide them with the best possible conditions of life so that they can fully fulfil themselves as individuals. We believe that it is essential to adopt effective measures to ensure their economic and social security as well as to give them ample opportunities to contribute to national development.

In this context, my delegation is pleased to reiterate Costa Rica's commitment to the follow-up and implementation of the International Plan of Action adopted in 1982 by the World Assembly on Ageing. In this regard, we support the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Costa Rica has carried out a number of concrete measures directed towards implementing the Principles contained in the International Plan of Action and in resolution 46/91. We recognize the contributions that the elderly make to Costa Rican society, and we have noted the wide range of difficult situations facing older people and the need to provide adequate policy responses. We have endeavoured to accord them recognition and to guarantee them the dignity, participation, independence and right to full development to which they are entitled.

Lastly, we have taken the necessary measures to provide them with the special care they require. The First Lady of Costa Rica, Mrs. Lorena Clare de Rodríguez, has participated actively, together with a national commission, in the launching of the International Year of Older Persons. A high-level forum of national authorities was held aimed at elaborating a number of programmes directed specifically at older persons. A study was carried

out on the situation of this segment of the population, national programmes were reviewed and a national time-table prepared for the activities to be carried out in this connection.

The various services provided to older persons in Costa Rica include multidisciplinary health-care teams comprising geriatric specialists, gerontologists, social workers, nurses, dentists and so on. These professionals provide support networks with social participation as part of a joint effort between the governmental and non-governmental sectors to provide integrated care for the elderly. This programme has been particularly successful.

Also in the area of health care, an off-site assistance programme has been launched that provides training for officials and the elderly and their families with respect to the basic health needs of that segment of the population. The programme provides wide coverage at a low cost. In addition, local committees have been established to care for the elderly, with guidance from the national geriatric hospital. We also have national and local agencies that provide care for older persons in case of abuse or abandonment. A "golden-age" programme has also been set up through which elderly persons receive special treatment in banks, public transportation and commercial establishments. To this end they are provided with special identification cards.

In order to promote a society for all ages, and in particular to improve relations between young people and the elderly, a condition has been set for the granting of fellowships that requires young people to provide services to older persons. It is felt that communication and apprenticeship between these two groups will benefit both segments of the population.

In this connection, the Office of the First Lady has submitted a bill to the Legislative Assembly for consideration and adoption whose aim is to consolidate existing achievements and adopt additional measures.

For all of these reasons, we are very pleased to support the draft resolution submitted to this special meeting of the General Assembly, a draft that we are co-sponsoring with great interest. We hope that it will be adopted by consensus with a view to contributing to the establishment of a society for all ages and to the well-being of the older persons of the world, who are in such need of this and who will so greatly appreciate it.

Lastly, we must recognize the important role played by Ambassador Julia Alvarez of the Dominican Republic in the launching of the International Year of Older Persons 1999 on 1 October 1998. We wish also to express appreciation for the cooperation of the Department of Public Information and the non-governmental Committee on Ageing.

Mr. Prosser (Australia): Australia has been a strong supporter of the International Year of Older Persons. We have warmly embraced the concept within Australia, and in so doing have been proud to contribute to the international efforts to promote the objectives of the year, as encapsulated in the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, and covering the key areas of independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

Australia believes that older persons have a critical role to play in the development of society. They should be viewed as active participants in the global community who have an important contribution to make to the community rather than persons who are dependent on society for care and respite.

Recognition of the legitimate and valuable role of older people in society is increasingly important as the average age of the older population increases. As recent statistics show, the average age of life expectancy is on the increase. On a global scale, more than one in 10 persons are now over the age of 60. This ratio will increase further in the coming years.

In Australia too, the age of our population is increasing. In the next 20 years the number of people in Australia aged 80 years and over is expected to grow by 63 per cent, from just under 500,000 people in 1996 to about 850,000, or one in four, by 2016.

The Australian Government recognizes the important and valuable contribution older persons make to our society at the political, community and family levels. Within Australia we have considered the International Year of Older Persons as an important opportunity to promote a nationwide approach to the issues of ageing, to celebrate the diversity and richness of our older population, and to acknowledge their ongoing contribution to society. In Australia, as in other countries, the International Year has also provided the opportunity and the impetus to work actively to change the way Australians perceive older people and ageing.

We all know that shifting attitudes is a fundamental factor in bringing about real change in society.

Australia has taken its commitment to the International Year of Older Persons seriously. We commenced our preparations early. During 1998 extensive community consultations were undertaken with older people in a variety of locations across Australia to ensure that the Government's policy framework for the year reflected the key issues of importance to these people.

Ten major themes emerged from these community consultations. These ranged from health and well-being to employment and education. These provided the basis for the Federal Government's priorities and projects during 1999. The 10 themes were incorporated into the terms of reference for the Government's key policy response to the International Year — a National Strategy for an Ageing Australia.

I am pleased to report that under the management of the Minister for Aged Care, The Honourable Bronwyn Bishop MP, the National Strategy for an Ageing Australia has formed the basis for the development of a series of practical and innovative initiatives and activities which have been designed to promote, recognize and encourage the role of older people in our society.

Major national initiatives have included a national "Active Australia" media campaign which promotes the benefits of activity for older Australians; a national information programme to inform older Australians about new technology associated with electronic banking; and a project developed by the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business to assist and promote mature-age job seekers.

In the field of education, funding has been provided for national programmes such as the International Year of Older Persons Learning Circles Project, which is aimed at developing a programme in each state and territory to offer older Australians the opportunity to take part in small, informal discussions and learning groups on a variety of topics.

Australia has designed a national Recognition Award for Senior Australians and a national Government Senior Australian of the Year Award, thereby creating what we believe may be the first awards of their kind. These awards recognize the invaluable contribution of senior Australians to the community. The Government Senior Australian of the Year Award was announced by the Prime Minister on 30 September 1999, the eve of the International Day of Older Persons. The recipient of the award, Slim Dusty, is a well-known Australian country music singer who relates well to all groups of Australians and has been recording country music hits for over 50 years. At 72 years of age, he ignores retirement and continues to do what he loves: performing, travelling and recording music to share with others. However, more importantly, Slim Dusty is also known for his philanthropic activities, which involve visiting the sick, playing at concerts for those less fortunate and working with the Australian Heart Foundation.

Under the Recognition Awards Programme initiative, the community has been encouraged to nominate for an award senior Australians who are outstanding role models in the local community. In each electorate, up to 20 senior Australians who have made a significant contribution to their local community will be selected to receive Recognition Awards. The most outstanding award winner from each electorate will be invited to attend a number of special celebratory events in mid-November 1999 in Australia's capital city, Canberra.

As part of a comprehensive communication strategy, the Minister for Aged Care recently released a kit which provided communities at the local level with a range of information about the International Year of Older Persons and the implementation of associated activities. A national International Year of Older Persons newsletter and Web site have also been developed. The Royal Australian Mint has officially launched a six-coin collector's set with an International Year of Older Persons $1 coin. Australia Post has released two 45 cent stamps to commemorate the Year.

In the health field, the Healthy Ageing Task Force has developed a coordinated nationwide approach to healthy ageing and the International Year of Older Persons. The Task Force includes representatives from the federal, state and territory governments of Australia. It has produced a draft national healthy ageing strategy aimed at identifying challenges for government, business, the community and individuals, to meet the needs of Australians as they age.

Complementing these initiatives, the Australian Government has worked to encourage widespread community involvement in the International Year of Older Persons. Within an overall budget of close to 11 million Australian dollars allocated for International Year

of Older Persons activities, the Government has provided $A 560,000 to establish the Australian Coalition '99, a nationwide network of more than 1,100 non-governmental organizations whose membership is drawn from, and that are focused on, the ageing population.

Australian Coalition '99 has provided an important framework and coordinated activities and events for the International Year of Older Persons in the community. The Coalition has proved to be a dynamic force behind Australian initiatives to promote the International Year. It has also laid a firm foundation within the community for the long-term promotion of the objectives of the International Year of Older Persons.

Australia has a deep commitment to working actively to develop an integrated society in which older people are not discriminated against because of their age. It is important that we continue to recognize that the wisdom and contribution of the older Australian is the foundation and strength of our society. The activities and initiatives I have described in connection with the International Year of Older Persons have provided a firm basis for bringing about a real change in Australia's perceptions of older persons. We recognize that this is an ongoing process and that it is up to both the Government and the community to maintain the momentum.

At the global level, as in Australia, it is important also to ensure that the momentum for change does not cease when the year draws to a close on 31 December 1999. To this end, we support the holding of a global meeting in 2002 to review the outcome of the first World Assembly on Ageing. Australia expects to be able to report on the implementation of its National Strategy for an Ageing Australia at that global meeting.

Mr. Bundhun (Mauritius): I am deeply pleased and honoured to participate, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius, in the plenary meetings of the United Nations General Assembly devoted specifically to the International Year of Older Persons. Let me, at the very outset, take this opportunity to convey to you, Mr. President, and to all the delegations present in this Assembly, the warmest greetings of my Government and the people of Mauritius, in particular our elderly persons.

My delegation would like to join other delegations in saluting the commendable initiative taken by the General Assembly to devote four plenary meetings at its fifty-fourth session to enabling Member States to report on the observance of the International Year of Older Persons. This in itself testifies to the unflinching determination of the international community to provide greater attention to the conditions of our elderly.

It is indeed very sad to recall here that, like other vulnerable groups in our society, such as women and children, the elderly population usually has to bear the brunt of the harsh realities of socio-economic development or the undesirable consequences of natural calamities, conflicts and terrors of war. Unfortunately, this is the current situation in several countries which, on account of various circumstances, are unable to provide adequate attention to the elderly population. On the other hand, over the years there has been a growing tendency to overlook the significant contribution of our elderly in the forging of the socio-economic development of our respective countries and, above all, in enabling the world to attain an unprecedented level of progress and development in almost all fields, whether economic, technological or scientific, over the span of a few decades in the course of this century.

It is in recognition of the exceptional role played by our elders in the making of this modern world that all Member States and the world at large should pay tribute to our elderly population and should strive together, through national and international collaboration, towards creating the appropriate conditions for the well-being of our elders, particularly the less fortunate and vulnerable ones.

While the International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted at the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, succeeded in arousing world awareness on the ageing issue, there is currently an urgent need to review that Plan in order to take into account the socio-economic changes which have taken place over the past 20 years. We therefore welcome the proposal to convene a second World Assembly in 2002 with a view to adopting a revised plan of action and a long-term strategy on ageing in the context of a society for all ages.

I am extremely delighted to be given the opportunity to share with other delegations the efforts made by my country for the observance of the International Year of Older Persons. As a matter of fact, since October 1998, the Government of Mauritius has set up a National Organizing Committee under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare, made up of all the sectors concerned, to work out the necessary preparations for the implementation of a programme of activities to mark the celebration of the

year. In order to show the determination of the Government in promoting the interest of the elderly population, our Prime Minister personally launched the programme of activities in January, and the ceremony was broadcast live on television for our elderly population and the public at large.

The programme provides for the implementation of a number of activities with a view to sensitizing the population on the issue of ageing and to providing opportunities for the social integration of our elderly. The programme relates mainly to the introduction of leisure and recreational activities for the elderly at all social-welfare and community centres located in various parts of the country; regional meetings with the participation of some 25,000 elderly persons; essay competitions in schools and colleges on the theme of the elderly so as to sensitize the younger generation about the need to show respect and provide care for our elders; talks on intergenerational solidarity to emphasize the need for greater collaboration among generations; trade fairs by the elderly to highlight the potential of our elderly population; the issue of a special commemorative cover by the Government Post Office; a medical week, in the course of which a national campaign was launched regarding the health service facilities available to the elderly; song and dance competitions to encourage the participation of the elderly in social activities; and the hosting of an international meeting of the Fédération Internationale des Associations de Personnes Agées. In the course of the meeting, discussions were centred on strategies to cope with the ageing phenomenon and on the need to set up a Federation of Senior Citizens Associations in the Indian Ocean region.

The activities also included a meeting of all centenarians with the President of the Republic of Mauritius at the State House, at which some 20 centenarians were present — this might have been a unique event in the world; opening of a museum and archives featuring the various facets of life of our elders from their arrival as immigrants; an open day for our institutions providing residential care to the elderly; story-telling competitions; and a special get-together for elderly couples who have lived 50 years or more of married life together.

In addition to those activities, a number of firms in the private sector have agreed, in the context of the International Year of Older Persons, to provide facilities to our elderly such as: reduced prices for cinema tickets; reduced entry fees at nature parks; reduced bus prices for outings; special packages for travelling to dependency islands; and reserved seats in buses. I am particularly pleased to report that all these activities have been successfully implemented, with the participation of some 450 senior citizens associations representing some 25,000 elderly persons.

Moreover, since the proclamation in 1992 of 1 October as the International Day of Older Persons, the Government of Mauritius has been organizing on that day every year special recreational activities on public beaches around the country, with the participation of some 20,000 senior citizens. On 1 October of this year, which is the last of this century, we organized a national exhibition on the elderly, featuring photos, utensils, traditional dresses, musical instruments and other items which have been used by our elders in the past. We are planning to proceed in November with the opening of a recreation centre for the elderly, which will be of international standard and which will provide residential accommodation for about 150 persons at a time. This recreation centre will be unique in the Indian Ocean region.

We are also proposing to introduce in the very near future appropriate legislation to generally protect the rights of the elderly and to ensure that our elderly residing in homes receive the required care within acceptable norms. A senior citizens welfare fund will also be set up soon with a view to providing emergency assistance to needy elderly persons who are unable to meet the basic necessities of life. In this connection, a *comité de sages* will also be set up at every social welfare and community centre in order to identify those needy elderly requiring such assistance.

It is worth mentioning here that, following a cabinet reshuffle about a week ago, our Prime Minister has officially added to my responsibilities the welfare of the elderly, changing the name of my ministry from the Ministry of Social Security and National Solidarity to the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens' Welfare. This addition was made in recognition of the increasing importance attached by the Government of Mauritius to the issue of the elderly, especially in the context of the International Year of Older Persons. However, I must emphasize that, well before the advent of the International Year of Older Persons, the Government of Mauritius had for a number of years been very attentive to the social needs of our elderly persons and has been providing them with adequate support and protection in terms of: a monthly non-contributory pension payable on a universal basis to every citizen aged 60 years and above; payment of an

additional monthly pension to elderly persons requiring constant personal care and attention; the setting up of senior citizens' associations around the country to promote the organization of recreational and leisure activities for the elderly; organization throughout the year of a number of activities such as outings and residential holiday camps; facilities such as rebates on air fares, reduced fees for the issuance of passports, exemptions from payment of airport tax, half fare for bus travel, home visits for those aged 90 and above, issue of blankets and assistive devices to disabled elderly people; and provision of a cash gift and support for the one-hundredth birthday celebrations of our centenarians, whose present number is 38 and is expected to reach 45 by the end of the year.

In addition, over the past four years, the Government has introduced new policy measures to consolidate further existing social support schemes so as to reduce inequalities and provide greater protection for the elderly population. In this respect, since 1996, my Government has granted an increase of more than 100 per cent in the non-contributory pensions payable to the elderly population. A project for the renovation of charitable institutions providing residential care to the elderly has also been under way, in collaboration with the Luxembourg Government, since last year. The project, costing 52 million Mauritian rupees, comprises the modernization of equipment, the training of staff and the renovation of these institutions with a view to improving the quality of life of their inmates.

Increasing efforts are also being made to sensitize the population on the ageing issue, which is becoming a serious concern to many countries. In fact, the world population of persons over 60 years of age has increased rapidly and is expected to reach 616 million in 2000 and 1.2 billion in 2025. Mauritius is no exception to this phenomenon. The proportion of persons aged 60 and above has increased from 6 per cent of the total population in 1972 to 9.6 per cent at present, and is expected to reach 19 per cent by the year 2025. As in many other countries, this phenomenon of ageing is expected to have serious socio-economic implications, mainly in terms of increased social security benefits and public sector pensions and increased expenditure on health care and housing. We have already started to address this complex issue with the preparation of a white paper on ageing containing a number of proposals and measures for implementation over the coming years. This white paper is currently under serious consideration by a high-level ministerial committee.

The Government of Mauritius is deeply committed to promoting the welfare of the elderly population. In fact, this commitment is inherent in the history of our country, which has made significant socio-economic progress over the span of a century thanks to the dedication, hard work and spirit of sacrifice of our forefathers, who were brought from other shores to settle in our country. We have therefore never spared any effort to pay tribute to the valuable contribution of our forefathers in making our country achieve a worldwide reputation in terms of socio-economic progress, peace, stability and respect for human rights.

In the context of the International Year of Older Persons, it is only fitting that we pay due recognition to the contribution of our elders in the development of our countries and in the safeguard of our traditions, values and cultures, which are so important for our national stability. Let us therefore take advantage of their valuable experience and let their sense of dedication, their spirit of sacrifice and their moral values be a permanent source of inspiration to us, and particularly to our younger generation.

Despite being a small country, Mauritius is extremely delighted to be able share with other Member States its encouraging experience with regard to the care and support schemes provided for its elderly population. In the spirit of the theme of the International Year of Older Persons — "Towards a society for all ages" — let our young generation, in a gesture of intergenerational solidarity, open up their arms towards our elders and provide them with the required support.

May I now conclude by reaffirming the commitment of my Government to attaining the goals and objectives set out by the United Nations in the context of the observance of the International Year of Older Persons.

Mr. Boisson (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): In all human societies, older persons have occupied an essential, even a dominant, place. Historians, ethnologists, sociologists all agree: older persons represented, even in the most ancient civilizations sources of inspiration, wisdom and judgement. They were esteemed and respected, their words heeded. Their life experience often served as reference points for the conduct of affairs in the community, the village or the city. Their status has declined over the years, until the elderly became isolated, sometimes even excluded from society.

Doubtless changing lifestyles may partly explain this phenomenon. Increasing urbanization, the dispersal of families, the organization of labour, different values, more individual than those that governed human relations even just a few decades ago — all these have weakened the role of elderly people in daily life.

Societies today, so-called modern or progressive societies, inspired by the international community and the will of nations, have decided to commemorate each year on the first of October an international day in their honour, doubtless because they have understood that it would be a real mistake to neglect the wealth of the accumulated and compounded lived experience of our elders and not to tap the availability and good will of thousands of people with many abilities.

Barely a year ago, on 1 October 1998, the International Year of Older Persons was launched successfully throughout the world and at United Nations Headquarters on the theme, "A society for all ages". The Principality of Monaco unreservedly endorsed the proclaimed goal of this theme. The involvement of my country in the commemoration of this Year was symbolized by the production of a postal stamp reproducing the logo chosen by the United Nations.

The Principality's Government, furthermore, upon the initiation of His Serene Highness, the Sovereign Prince, organized some special events to commemorate the Year. In particular, we developed and carried out a policy for ageing, striving to preserve and strengthen inter-generational solidarity and to promote the inspiring concept of a society for all ages. Since 1 October 1998 and until the end of this year, events have been organized and coordinated with a steering committee of public authorities, associations of retirees and young people, as well as social organizations. These various events have brought the generations closer. Young students have been invited to help in these cultural or educational or social events, among which I could refer to the organization of medical conferences, exhibiting works of art and the publication of a book of older persons' reminiscences related to Monaco's history.

A policy for older persons attests to the fundamental values that a country intends to promote. For many years now, we in Monaco have worked on actions to improve the living standards of older people, providing care facilities, financial assistance and specific measures to make their daily lives easier in an atmosphere of safety, with things such as meals on wheels, home help and medical alert systems.

Upon the initiative of His Serene Highness, and in accordance with the guidelines of the World Health Organization, we have established services to allow the elderly and the disabled to continue to live at home. Of course, these people can still chobse whether to remain at home or to be moved to a residence.

Turning to Government housing activities, a certain number of apartments will be specially designed for older and disabled persons and built in busy neighbourhoods, near shops and public transportation. For persons who need to placed in an institution, a long-term-stay establishment near the Princess Grace Hospital Centre will be built very soon.

Turning to financial matters, older Monagasques and older persons residing in Monaco receive, if necessary, a monthly allowance to subsidize their needs. The amount of this allowance, increased by 10 per cent this year on the occasion of the jubilee of His Serene Highness, the Sovereign Prince, is now close to the minimum wage.

These initiatives are particularly essential since the ageing of the population and the drop in the birth rate are particularly marked in our country. At the last population census, it was revealed that 22 per cent of our residents were over 65, and 11 per cent were over 75. According to some projections, in 2010 persons over 65 years old will account for 25 per cent of the population, whereas between the years 1990 and 2010, the percentage of persons over 85 is to increase by over 60 per cent.

Since the age pyramid is shrinking and could disappear, and since longevity is increasing, States both in the North and in the South need to adopt a new approach to ageing. It is now up to political and social leaders, in cooperation with the older people themselves, families and communities, to conceive of ageing in an active, dynamic way, not just as a matter of passive maintenance.

New demographic trends are forcing Governments to consider means to promote an old age which is more involved in society and community activities. This means that throughout a person's life span, physical and material capacities of individuals, particularly of women, whose average life expectancy is longer than that of men, must be maintained and even developed.

The policy adopted by the Government of the Principality seeks to ensure, in the context of increased longevity, living standards that meet the aspirations of our society and that are adapted to the context of the Principality of Monaco. It will achieve this by involving all of the community, including young people, in order to maintain this very valuable link between generations.

The report of the Secretary-General on the activities and the legacy of the Year attests to the interest shown by States, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations in establishing infrastructures and relations among various stakeholders to make it possible, as the programme of action on ageing advocates, that the preparation of the population as a whole for the last stages of life is an integral part of social policies and takes into account physical, psychological, cultural, religious, spiritual, economic, health and all other factors.

We are convinced that the special session the General Assembly will hold next year on the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development will make it possible to define specific strategies to establish "A society for all ages". Accordingly, the United Nations programme on ageing, which served as the secretariat for the International Year of Older Persons and which is the key element for the success of this commemoration, will have a decisive role to play in the follow-up to the Year. We would like to assure that secretariat of our full support.

The delegation of Monaco would also like to express its full support for the draft resolution resulting from our efforts.

Mrs. Eldermire-Shearer (Jamaica): Jamaica associates itself with the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We wish to thank the Secretary-General for the support and leadership he has provided on this issue. We also acknowledge the invaluable contribution of Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez of the Dominican Republic to the promotion of issues relating to the elderly.

It is no coincidence that the International Year of Older Persons is being observed at the end of this century, a century that has witnessed some of the most profound changes in human society. The rapid advances in science and technology, which have resulted in dramatic improvements in health, hygiene, nutrition and longevity, have also been attended by a swelling of the number of persons living to old age. Since 1950, global life expectancy has risen by 20 years to its present level of 60 years. The proportion of older persons has also increased significantly. Currently, 1 of every 10 persons is now 60 years or older, and by the year 2050, 1 in 5 will be 60 or older. The subject is of particular importance to the Caribbean, given that its ageing population is the oldest in the developing world.

Accordingly, we are grateful for the focus that has been placed on the challenges created by this demographic revolution, and for the report of the Secretary-General on the issue. The report demonstrates that the issue of population ageing is a complex interaction requiring collaboration between many agencies, governmental departments and non-governmental organizations. It is critical that ageing policies be integrated into the broader development framework.

Jamaica is also experiencing its own version of the demographic revolution, and the Government has established programmes to deal with the challenges that this phenomenon presents. Currently, senior citizens make up 10 per cent of the Jamaican population, and our life expectancy is in excess of 72 years. The elderly also make up the only segment of our population that increases in percentage terms from year to year. It is projected that by the year 2020 there will be approximately 400,000 senior citizens in Jamaica. In recognition of the additional needs of senior citizens — in particular, their additional health-care needs — the Jamaica Drugs for the Elderly Programme was instituted for all seniors, regardless of income levels. The Programme subsidizes the cost of prescription drugs for ailments that are particularly prevalent among the aged. There are now more than 100,000 persons age 60 and older registered in the Programme.

The Government of Jamaica, in recognizing the importance of senior citizens, in 1976 established a National Council on Ageing to advise on and develop programmes to improve the quality of life of seniors. The Council has both national and field operations, which are operated mainly by volunteers. The Council was the named focal point for the International Year of Older Persons and organized the Year's programmes. The Government provided the operational budget, and the private sector provided substantial additional assistance. The list of activities is being circulated in this Hall. I will, however, highlight a few.

The Government of Jamaica remains committed to the advancement of our senior citizens and has viewed

the observance of this year as an opportunity both to address deficiencies in the policies and programmes that relate to older persons and to build collaborative relationships. The activities for the year were organized around the general theme of "Towards a society for all ages", with particular emphasis being placed on two of the suggested sub-themes: the intergenerational approach and the developmental aspects of population ageing.

Education on ageing and associated issues was a major thrust of the Year. A major initiative, which will continue into the new millennium, is the education of young persons and their teachers about the life-course perspective of ageing. A second objective is to increase understanding and respect for older persons on the part of the other generations. Young persons need to understand that ageing is not a disease but a natural and inevitable process and that they should begin preparing for this stage of life while they are still young. A poster and essay competition was launched in support of this effort. The education component included a programme for other age groups, including the mid-life group, in support of the Active Ageing Global Embrace campaign.

For the future, strong collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Education — efforts supported personally by both Ministers — will continue. They will include curriculum development and education activities for students and teachers. The University of the West Indies, with funding from Help Age International, has developed a training programme for caregivers. This programme is simple enough to understand regardless of the trainee's level of literacy. The programme was developed in recognition of the importance of caregiving, which will be of increasing importance in the years to come. In recognition of the International Year, a manual for family caregiving is now being prepared.

We are grateful to the United Nations for the earlier initiatives that produced the global and national targets that are the foundations of Jamaica's National Policy on Ageing. The National Policy, which was submitted in Parliament in 1997 was widely publicized during the Year. It addresses eight main areas, including education, health, social security and income security. Advocacy was an essential tool in educating the population on the Government's National Policy. I wish to thank the local media in Jamaica for their collaboration, which included the weekly publication in the *Daily Gleaner* of a page dedicated to senior citizens' affairs.

The Government also sought to ensure that the subject of ageing remained at the forefront of the regional agenda. The Government moved resolutions at key meetings, such as at the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) Council on Human and Social Development in February 1999. CARICOM is also spearheading acceptance of a draft charter in support of healthy ageing, which charter was initiated in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization. The charter recognizes that patterns of living that enhance healthy and active ageing are formed early in life and continue throughout the lifespan. These patterns determine how well one is able to reduce and avoid diseases and disabilities and engage in social and productive activities.

Jamaica launched this charter at the national level during the walk in support of the Global Embrace on 2 October 1999. The charter was presented to leaders of Government, the private sector, trade unions, the churches and other non-governmental organizations that endorsed it at the launch.

In addition to economic concerns, research has identified loneliness and the lack of opportunities for social interaction as main concerns for Jamaica's senior citizens. There is now a programme, funded by a non-governmental organization but operated by the National Council, to support the income-generating activities of the seniors in Golden Age Clubs as a way of supporting productive ageing. More than 300 projects have been initiated, 30 of which were funded during the International Year.

As our hearts and eyes eagerly await the dawn of a new century and the promises which this exciting time will bring, let us not forget those who have accomplished much before us and upon whose shoulders we have built our present societies. It is our hope that future generations will be able to build a better, more compassionate world for our senior citizens in the years to come, so as to realize the aims of this year towards a society for all ages.

Ms. Corado-Cuevas (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Government of Guatemala welcomes all measures to promote the ongoing development and full participation of older persons, the guardians of the wisdom and values of our Guatemalan society, particularly within our indigenous population.

Our country is making a constant effort, within existing limitations, to translation the principles of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted in Vienna in 1982, into government policies and practical measures to meet the priority needs of older persons. Although a great deal remains to be done, the State and its institutions are responsible for providing older persons with the necessary conditions to ensure their quality of life by creating forward-looking mechanisms and strengthening national institutions that work on their behalf.

In this respect, Guatemala has adopted, *inter alia*, the following measures to protect older persons.

First, it enacted the Law on the Protection of Persons on the Third Age — Decree 80-96 of the Legislative Organ — whose purpose is to protect the interests of the elderly and to guarantee them living standards that are adequate for a useful and dignified existence. Its broad coverage includes, among other things, their right to participate in the national development process, their access without discrimination to sources of employment and their training for a second occupation. The Ministry of Public Health is responsible for health coverage. It is the responsibility of municipalities to eliminate architectural barriers to free movement, while public and private services are urged to provide exemptions and discounts in recognition of the social and economic situation of individuals. The foundations are also being laid to prevent and penalize mistreatment.

Secondly, we have created the post of Advocate for the Elderly within the National Attorney General's office. Its function is to support older persons in the case of verbal or physical abuse.

Thirdly, we have enacted the Law to Eradicate Family Violence — Decree 90-96 of the Legislative Organ — which protects the most vulnerable members of the family: children, women and the elderly.

I wish to make special reference to the Councils of Elders in our rural indigenous population, in which the elderly serve as guides to their people. These Councils are an example of power and authority established by the community; they provide guidance for the group and resolve conflicts. The members of the Councils orally transmit culture and knowledge, including traditional medicine. Women, unlike their counterparts elsewhere, play a role that is equally important as that of men. The Government of Guatemala is striving to help strengthen social indigenous institutions and, to that end, supports the Councils of Elders.

In addition, in commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons, a series of activities has been carried out in Guatemala to heighten the interest of the various sectors and to eliminate social and cultural barriers for older persons. We would cite, *inter alia*, the convening of congresses on gerontology, grandparents' fairs, health fairs, courses, sporting events, multigenerational parades, concerts, forums and so on, culminating last Saturday with a parade and a "Worldwide Embrace", with the participation of the President of the Republic.

In the future, we shall continue to strengthen all those activities in favour of older persons. That is why we support the convening of an international meeting in 2002 to review the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing. We also feel that the 1982 International Plan of Action on Ageing should be updated.

Lastly, I wish to express appreciation for the work carried out by the two Vice-Chairmen of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Older Persons: Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez of the Dominican Republic and Counsellor Aurelio Fernández of Spain. Since its establishment, the Consultative Group has been an important forum for exchanging information and experience among the various delegations, organs of the system and non-governmental organizations. It has enabled a continuous process of consultations to explore and analyze new individual and joint initiatives on issues concerning the third age.

Mr. Ribeiro Mendes (Portugal): Allow me to stress that Portugal fully subscribes to the statement made by the Finnish Presidency of the European Union.

Portugal, like most developed countries, is currently facing the enormous political, social and economic challenges associated with the accentuated ageing of its population. It is in this group of older persons that the risk of social exclusion is most prevalent. Also, several challenges arise from the ageing of the work force and the relative decrease in the economically active population. These challenges require the management of human resources to focus to a greater extent on age-related issues, a factor that has been neglected until now. They also call for the reformulation of policies that traditionally have provided incentives for early retirement from the labour market and for a new focus on lifelong

education and the provision of new opportunities for the elderly.

A second aspect of this challenge has to do with the pressures exerted on pension schemes and on public financial resources as a result of the growing number of retirees and the overall decrease in the population of working age. The growing need for health and social support services for the older person is a third aspect of these challenges. The dramatic increase in the number of older persons needing assistance will exert growing pressure on the existing long-term care system. Policies aimed at limiting an increase in dependency through the fostering of healthy ageing, the prevention of accidents and recovery following illness should be adopted.

To achieve these goals, the Portuguese Government has been developing innovative social policies for the active promotion of social rights. Thus, the following measures and social programmes have been developed.

In 1996 Portugal launched the guaranteed minimum income programme, which presently supports more than 130,000 families and nearly 400,000 persons, accounting for 4 per cent of the population of the country, of whom 90,000 are already covered by social insertion programmes. A significant portion of the beneficiaries are older persons aged 65 years or over.

Portugal has also adopted a new policy that differentiates the yearly increases of benefits to assist the more than 1 million individuals whose pensions are lower than the national minimum wage. At the same time, entitlement to old age pensions is now more flexible, so that the workers may adjust the timing of their retirement to professional, family or even labour market factors. When changes were made the preservation and financial sustainability of the social security system were kept in mind.

The measures I have mentioned do not pre-empt the need for the definition of a coherent strategy for the reform of Portugal's social security system, within the framework of our integration in the European Union.

As defined by the Portuguese Government, there are three major areas of universal social welfare which respond to new social risks, changes in the economy and the new ethics of the contractual partnership between the State and its citizens. These areas are, first, the protection of vulnerable groups and individuals, which is pursued through a system of entitlements based on citizenship and guaranteed through national solidarity; secondly, the protection of families, accomplished through the provision of cash benefits and services for the support of the older person facing dependency and other situations of great vulnerability; and, thirdly, income substitution schemes, which, through mandatory social security contributory regimes based on inter-professional and inter-generational solidarity, as well as voluntary private pension schemes, are to be fostered through adequate policies and incentives.

Portugal, as a member of the European Union, has placed social policies involving employment, job training, health, solidarity and social security at the very centre of its development model. These policies are in tune with the fundamental choices of the Union, with a view to a sustainable growth of the economy, with social justice, in a Europe for all ages.

The need to develop an active strategy for ageing has frequently been highlighted, both in the area of employment policies and in the areas of social action, health care and family policies.

Our policies of active ageing will continue to remove the constraints on lifelong flexibility for all citizens, so as to offer them a greater selection of options in areas such as education, job training, employment and health that can help them preserve their autonomy during old age. Thus, prolonged care should be regarded as a natural social risk to be jointly financed by the economically active population and the older person. Balanced access to home care and institutions should ensure an increasingly wider and financially sustainable coverage.

The reform of our public pensions system should also be considered in the light of this strategy of active ageing, taking into account the increase in longevity and the economic value of the older person as a human resource.

The need for new benefits geared specifically to the chronic dependency of the oldest citizens is also being addressed. In particular, as of July this year the social protection to be extended to old-age pensioners in a situation of dependency was defined and regulated. This resulted in the establishment of cash benefits whose amount varies according to the degree of dependency.

In conclusion, the autonomy of the older person and the enhancement of the abilities and skills of both

families and the community to deal with long-term dependency are now the main objectives of our social policies.

As stated by the presidency of the European Union yesterday, Portugal also regards the International Year of Older Persons as an important starting point and an opportunity to continue to build a world in which all generations may fully enjoy their rights of citizenship, fulfilling their personal goals in freedom and solidarity.

The actions taken within the United Nations system, which we praise, will yield their fruits if we can follow up on them. For our part, we will not relent in our efforts to develop active ageing strategies that allow older persons to live a longer life, with greater autonomy and fully integrated in the society to which they belong.

We will pursue these efforts in total solidarity with all the peoples of the world, continuing to contribute to this cause, which, from the old Europe to the emerging new countries, has often involved terrible social and human costs, particularly for the elderly and other vulnerable groups. The ongoing creation of the independent State of East Timor, which dramatically illustrates this, constitutes a responsibility for all mankind that will deserve our continued support.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): I wish to associate myself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Guyana, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

My delegation welcomes the report (A/54/268) of the Secretary-General and commends him for his efforts on this issue. As this year draws to a close, the world is reminded that all members of society should be given equal opportunities, irrespective of their age, as long as those citizens are able to participate in the activities of a society. We are also reminded of the new thinking that older persons must be viewed not as burdens on society, but rather, as useful citizens with equal obligations to shape our future.

Nambia's commitment to its older citizens is well known. Namibia is one of the very few countries in Africa which pay an old-age pension to its citizens who have reached the age of 60 years, until their departure from this world. Although this old-age pension is not sufficient to provide for all the needs of our elderly, especially for those who live in urban areas, it provides income and important sustenance to the majority of our elderly who live in rural areas. This old-age pension has also made it possible for the elderly in our society to care for their grandchildren, most of whom are left orphaned after their parents have died of the AIDS virus.

In addition to the old-age pension, the Government of Namibia also provides social welfare services to the elderly in the form of old-age homes. The elderly in these homes are provided with adequate care, including health care. They are also treated as State patients at no cost.

In order to supplement the insufficient old-age pension, the President of the Republic of Namibia will be launching a pension fund for the elderly at the end of this month. This launching is undertaken to coincide with the year-long activities of the International Year of Older Persons. The Government of Namibia is also currently advocating the possibility of formulating a national plan on the aged in our society.

It is estimated that by the year 2050, the elderly population of 60 years of age and older will be over 2 billion. This would be the first time in the history of humankind that the number of elderly would be greater than the number of children. It is also estimated that in the year 2050 the percentage of people of age 60 or older in Namibia will be more than three times what it is now.

It has been said that although we are living in the age of ageing, it is a territory of uncharted waters. It is a given fact that we are all talking about increased life expectancy in terms of expectations for quality of life and the type of services required to cope with future increasingly aged societies. Older men and women will require opportunities and support systems, including for income generation, social security and health care. We must thus plan in advance.

It is therefore fitting that the International Year's theme is "A society for all ages". The older people of today are in many ways the pioneers of yesterday and the foundation of tomorrow. Their tenacity and courage made our future so much easier, safer and healthier. It is thus incumbent upon all of us to make sure that we live in a society which will not discriminate against the aged. After all, we are all following the same path. It is only a matter of time before we ourselves will become the aged of tomorrow.

In this regard, we wish to express our appreciation for the preparatory work of the past two years to declare 1999 the International Year of Older Persons. This has

been a collaborative and cooperative effort by Governments, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. The adoption of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons in 1991 and the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing in 1992 provide us with a broad framework and guidance on what action to take on ageing.

I cannot conclude my remarks without referring to the negative impact the AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa has on our elderly population. In my country, Namibia, the elderly are left to care for the children who have become orphans after their parents have succumbed to the disease. Their role becomes that not only of grandparents but also of parents and caretakers. This has left the Government of Namibia with no other option but to redouble its efforts to ensure that this burden is mitigated by giving security to our elderly and supporting their needs in raising the children left behind.

However, in most traditional societies, such as that of Namibia, the elderly are also taken care of by the society and by their immediate families. Our customs require that the elderly be taken care of and provided for. For it is they who shaped our future.

This issue of the elderly is of particular importance to us, and therefore we hope that the draft resolution on this subject will be adopted without a vote.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): On 28 August 1948, the Argentine Government adopted the Declaration of Old Age Rights. This Declaration recognized that older persons enjoy specific rights: the rights to assistance, accommodation, food, physical and moral health care, recreation, work, stability and respect.

That initiative, supported by all political efforts and supplemented by adequate budgetary resources, was an important social step forward for Argentina, a country characterized by a multicultural population that was still assimilating the great influx of migration of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In 1948, the world had scarcely begun to recover from the Second World War. In its tragic aftermath, great instruments were being created, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted at the end of that same year, and the Geneva Conventions, adopted the following year.

But longevity was not such an urgent question at that time; a developing country's stipulations that older persons enjoyed rights inherent to their age was in the vanguard. That initiative went beyond Argentina's domestic sphere.

It is interesting to reread United Nations documents from that time. On page 618 of the *Yearbook of the United Nations* for 1948-1949, it says that on 23 September 1948 Argentina raised this issue in document A/621 at the third session of the General Assembly, held that year at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, requesting its inclusion in the agenda and submitting the Draft Declaration of Old Age Rights in document A/C.3/213.

During the night meeting of the Third Committee on 22 November 1948, Ambassador Enrique Corominas introduced the item on behalf of Argentina. On 30 November, the Committee adopted it by 28 votes in favour, with 10 abstentions. That night, following the vote, the Argentine representative thanked representatives who had voted in favour of the Argentine proposal. He also thanked the representatives who had abstained, because the assistance of both had made it possible to consecrate a legitimate right that someday would be incorporated into the legislation of all countries.

Finally, on 4 December 1948, the General Assembly adopted resolution 213 (III) by 48 votes in favour, none against and 1 abstention. Thus, the question of older persons was introduced for the first time in the United Nations. The rights envisaged in that 1948 ideal today are found in the 62 recommendations of the International Plan of Action on Ageing of 1982 and in other subsequent instruments.

Fifty-one years have passed since 1948. That is not so long, for it is the same number of years remaining until 2050, when the number of people over 60 will exceed the number of those under 15. In some places this will even occur some decades earlier. The extension of average lifespan, particularly in the societies that create most wealth, and the decline in the birth rate, are producing an unprecedented demographic shift in which the population pyramid looks like the one of 50 years ago, turned upside down. These statistics show that in a few more years the international community will need to have resolved all the obstacles to achieving a multigenerational society which guarantees dignity and usefulness for older persons, integrating them into the fabric of society.

The task ahead will be a very difficult one: in a few more years, the United Nations programme on ageing will probably need to take on the scale and visibility enjoyed by other agencies in the system today if there is to be an effective response to this challenge. At the global, national and local levels, education, the market, health and all social actors must have accepted older persons as useful agents for development.

Today the question of older persons which was brought to the United Nations 51 years ago has become a much larger issue: the International Year is proof. Argentina is involved in the Year through a number of initiatives, some of which were mentioned in paragraph 10 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268). Argentina is particularly concerned about the effects of poverty on older persons. Among other activities, the national plan for older persons is assisting almost half a million poor older persons by providing food supplements, group outings, subsidies and medicines. The *Probienestar* wellness programme, geriatric programmes and economic subsidies of the National Institute for Social Security for Retirees and Pensioners and the Programme for Solidarity Assistance for Older Persons run by the Department of Social Development are other current initiatives.

Today, this challenge concerns all countries. Argentina supports the proposal to hold a Second World Assembly on Ageing 20 years after the first great world summit on ageing, in 1982. We are happy to support Spain's effort — a country which we wish to thank for the cooperation it has provided for Argentina in this field — to have the Second World Assembly on Ageing in that country.

When the International Year is over, the work must still go on. As Ambassador Julia Alvarez of the Dominican Republic has so rightly said — and we do wish to recognize her clear-sightedness, dedication and efforts — it is to be hoped that we will have the determination and vision to ensure that on 31 December, the older persons will at last occupy their proper place on the world map.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am honoured to address the General Assembly on this item. I should like to associate my delegation with the statement by the Permanent Representative of Guyana speaking on behalf of the Group of 77.

I commend the Secretary-General for his report (A/54/268) on this agenda item, and the Secretariat for the considerable efforts it has made for the observance of the International Year of Older Persons.

The ageing of populations and the increase in the number of elderly throughout the world which are the results of medical, hygienic, scientific and educational achievements are phenomena of the late twentieth century. This new development is producing changes in all aspects of community life, aspects such as the age structure, values, norms and institutions of societies at the global level.

The number of people aged 65 or over in 2025 is projected to be 828 million, which is more than two and a half times the 328 million figure for 1990. Although at present the greying of the population is more an issue in industrial countries, Asia too will be faced with a major ageing population group in the near future, so that by 2025 nearly 56 per cent of the world's over-60 population of 1,181 million will live in Asia.

Since there is a difference in longevity between the sexes — women generally live longer than men in nearly every part of the world, as the Secretary-General refers notes in his recent report to the General Assembly — women constitute a majority of the elderly population.

Despite the vast opportunities created by advances in technology, which have improved the quality of life of people at the global level, economic inequality has, unfortunately, been magnified and the number of people living in poverty — especially in developing countries — has dramatically increased. In this regard, elderly poor women are especially vulnerable, and therefore particular attention has to be paid to their needs in any welfare programme schemed for the elderly population.

This year, the core theme of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, held in Geneva in July, was devoted to poverty eradication and the empowerment and advancement of women. In the ministerial communiqué adopted at that session it was emphasized that in any strategies to eradicate poverty, the empowerment of women in particular was a prerequisite for effective poverty eradication and that the international community had a key role to play in supporting efforts to eradicate poverty.

In many developing countries, particularly in the Asian region, family support is considered the norm and people traditionally believe that family can provide the best emotional and economic support for older persons.

However, this practice is gradually weakening as a consequence of individualization, urbanization and the prevalence of a more nuclear family system. Therefore, in addition to family support, other sources of active involvement by Governments and various institutions of civil society — including the private sector and non-governmental organizations — should be invited to contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes for older people.

Although the Islamic Republic of Iran has a young population and the percentage of older persons above 60 years of age is not more than 6 per cent of the total population, my country nevertheless supports the common international framework established by the United Nations to promote the status of the elderly and is committed to supporting their rights, to utilizing their experiences and to providing them with adequate social security, including pension and health-care services. This conviction of ours stems from numerous recommendations of the Holy Koran for the respect, care and protection of parents and older persons. Also on the basis of our cultural and religious values, older persons, while protected by the family, are constantly being consulted on important family issues, which ensures their dignity.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the national welfare organization supports the elderly at the country level and provides them with welfare services. That organization, with its 63 centres, provides hospitalization and other accommodation to guardianless elderly people throughout the country. Also, the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee has a special responsibility to provide basic needs and services to elderly persons who do not have any family.

With regard to our national commitments to support the United Nations common framework for the promotion of the status of the elderly, several measures have been taken in my country for the betterment of the quality of life of older persons, *inter alia*, the raising of community awareness in this regard. Some of the measures taken are as follows.

Information and education campaigns on ageing to promote positive images of ageing are launched every year with the close collaboration of associations of retired persons on the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons, on 1 October.

In line with the commemoration of the United Nations International Year of Older Persons, a number of seminars on the problems of the elderly have been organized, books and articles have been published and movies, films and radio and television programmes have been produced.

Our first international conference on ageing is going to be held this month. That conference is sponsored by the Ladies' Charitable Society, an active Iranian non-governmental organization affiliated with the Kahrizak Home for the Disabled and the Elderly, which has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. The objective of the conference is to bring experts together from all over the world to exchange ideas, expertise and experience on issues related to the elderly.

Since ageing will be one of the major demographic, social, health and economic issues of the next millennium and needs to be confronted with great efficacy and timely planning, the gathering and exchange of information and knowledge between the Member States and international organizations, as was recommended in the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, while ensuring the ongoing process of paying special attention to the situation of the older persons at the global level, would also help strengthen the bonds between the older and younger generations with a view to deriving benefit from the experience and cultural heritage of older persons. In this regard, the Islamic Republic of Iran fully supports the suggestions for the development of a long-term perspective strategy on ageing for the twenty-first century.

Announcement

The President: I draw the attention of the Assembly to a matter concerning the maintenance of order in the Assembly Hall. Despite previous letters and appeals by my predecessors, numerous delegations are still letting cellular phones ring in the General Assembly Hall and in conference rooms while meetings are in progress. It is obvious that the ringing of telephones while debates or discussions are ongoing is disruptive of the orderly proceedings of the meetings. I urge representatives and other members of delegations to turn cellular telephones off or keep them in silent mode while in the General Assembly Hall or in a conference room and a meeting is in progress.

I am very serious about this matter and I may be forced to name non-compliant delegations should this renewed appeal be ignored.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.

United Nations

A/54/PV.26

General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

26th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 5 October 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Jordán-Pando (Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 106 (*continued*)

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family: follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.6)

Mr. Lewis (Antigua and Barbuda): Allow me at the outset to express my support for the statement made on Monday by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. I also wish to commend Ambassador Julia Alvarez of the Dominican Republic for her untiring efforts in support of the United Nations agenda for older persons.

As we focus on the theme of the International Year of Older Persons, "Towards a society for all ages", we are struck by its unifying nature. "Towards a society for all ages" clearly must embrace the notion of communities in which every member contributes to growth and prosperity. It must involve both young and old, and it must acknowledge the socio-economic changes affecting the ability of our countries to achieve the sustainable development inherent in "a society for all ages".

Older persons have traditionally served as a bonding agent for the immediate and extended family. The 1982 International Plan of Action on Ageing supports this intergenerational role by noting that throughout history, older persons have educated the younger and passed on values to them, a role that ensured humanity's survival and progress. Today many of our countries, particularly developing countries, struggle to retain these and similar bonds of tradition in the face of fewer development dollars, trends in migration and, perhaps most significantly, the onslaught of globalization.

Antigua and Barbuda's 1991 Population and Housing Census revealed that persons in the age group of 65 years and over made up 8.2 per cent of the population. I wish here, at this plenary meeting of the General Assembly commemorating the International Year of Older Persons, 1999, to pay homage to the contributions that these citizens have made to the building of our nation.

We acknowledge the significance of these contributions with pride. However, it is with a measure of disquiet that we must admit that the protection of this significant number of older persons has presented a challenge to the existing social and health services of Antigua and Barbuda. This challenge becomes even more acute when one considers the changes previously referred to in family structure and the gradual breakdown of the community support systems which existed in the past. The net result is that many older persons are living alone with minimal financial support and without assistance to complete basic household and other tasks. Those

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challenges notwithstanding, Antigua and Barbuda earnestly began to implement the 1982 International Plan of Action within its own national context.

Our country marked the beginning of the International Year on 1 October 1998. An awareness campaign was launched right at the outset, utilizing print and the electronic media to dispel many myths about and stereotypes of elders. Elders were included in all aspects of our independence activities in November; those who participated in the Independence Food Fair were awarded prizes for their contributions. From January to March 1999, an initiative to reconnect generations was launched, and it was observed with various activities throughout the year. During World Health Week in April, individual villages handed out honours to older persons who have remained active in their community. Also in April a national consultation began under the theme "active ageing makes a difference". The theme for this October's health fair is, "Active, healthy living and ageing". Some of the issues being discussed during the fair include nutrition, disease, sex and the elderly, HIV/AIDS, general health care and care for the mentally challenged elderly. Studies are currently being carried out by the Gender Affairs Division of the Ministry of Health and Social Improvement on the provision of free electricity and water services for persons 80 years of age and over.

In August 1990 the Citizen's Welfare Division conducted a needs analysis survey among older persons. The survey revealed that -- regardless of social or economic status - loneliness and neglect were the main problems confronting older persons in Antigua and Barbuda. They were followed closely by the need for assistance with household tasks, such as food preparation, cleaning and personal hygiene. Limited financial resources and poor housing were also identified as compelling problems. In order to best address the needs of the older segment of the population, the Government determined that it was necessary to enact legislation that could support the social welfare policy and facilitate programme implementation for both Government and non-governmental agencies. This was accomplished with a draft policy on ageing based on the proposed Caribbean charter on health and ageing, a draft of which was developed in Nassau, the Bahamas, in May 1998.

One of the main components of Antigua and Barbuda's draft policy on ageing was created out of the awareness that life expectancy cannot be separated from the enjoyment of good health. In this regard, several Government programmes have been identified to provide health services to the elderly. Outreach clinics, district doctors, the medical benefits scheme and the social security scheme are but a few of them.

Private agencies and institutions also play an active role in the care of older persons. The Board of Guardians provides a bimonthly stipend for those people 60 years of age and over who do not receive a pension. The Government collaborates regularly with such private agencies and institutions. The Antigua and Barbuda Association for the Welfare of Senior Citizens, for example, has recently acquired land from the Government and will soon start fund-raising activities for the construction of a centre.

The Citizen's Welfare Division has recognized the need to fill the gaps in the service needs of the physically healthy, yet vulnerable, elderly. To assist in bridging those gaps, the Government started a home help service in 1988 by which people are trained to provide health-care services in the homes of elders. The recipients are assessed according to age, mental and health status, mobility and disabilities, nutritional state, hygienic state and environmental and social conditions. An attendant programme, the welfare aides service, was established in 1990. That programme was developed to focus on meeting the social, recreational, emotional and even some of the spiritual needs of older persons. That programme is coordinated by the chief welfare officer.

The main goal of such programmes as the home help workers and the welfare aides service programmes is to maintain older persons in their homes and communities for as long as possible by meeting their personal care needs, thereby helping to relieve some of the loneliness and stress that elder participants have themselves identified as a main concern of their generation.

As was demonstrated in the twenty-second special session which recently concluded, small island developing States have particular vulnerabilities that affect all members of our societies, regardless of age. Because of our annual brush with potentially devastating natural disasters, the Citizen's Welfare Division and the National Office of Disaster Services have been working closely to ensure that the homes of older persons who may not be able to make requests themselves are included in the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase following a hurricane or other natural disaster. Due to the frequency of such storms, that is one of the single most important

examples of collaboration that exists in support of the elders of our community.

In conclusion, the wisdom contained in the International Plan of Action remains as relevant today as it was almost two decades ago. It states that the presence of the elderly in the family home, the neighbourhood and in all forms of social life still teaches an irreplaceable lesson of humanity.

We believe in those lessons of patience, respect and honour, and we know that if we are to add life to the years that have been added to life, we must continue to find ways to enable elders to play vital, contributing roles in their communities and thereby reclaim those valuable lessons of humanity.

Mr. Babar (Pakistan): My delegation associates itself with the statement on the International Year of Older Persons made by the Permanent Representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The international community has been conscious of the silent revolution which the phenomenon of ageing is likely to bring about in the population structure of the world in the next century. The Vienna World Assembly on Ageing in 1982 was a recognition at the international level of the fact that the ageing of the population would not only affect the developed countries but also have an impact on the developing countries.

The celebration of the International Year of Older Persons, as we stand on the threshold of the new millennium, provides a unique opportunity to evaluate the likely impact of this impending demographic revolution on various societies and to develop appropriate strategies to meet that challenge.

In his report entitled "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies" (A/54/268), the Secretary-General has given details of activities which the United Nations system, regional intergovernmental organizations, national Governments and non-governmental organizations have undertaken throughout the Year to promote public understanding of its theme, "Towards a society for all ages". These activities have helped to considerably enhance global awareness about this issue.

Fortunately, unlike many other challenges, the ageing of the population is predictable in its timing and its magnitude, which have already been identified. The elderly of the next century have already been born. Projections indicate that by 2050 the number of people aged 65 and beyond worldwide will grow from 426 million to 1.47 billion. The phenomenon of ageing has been more pronounced in developed countries, where reduced fertility together with declining mortality has transformed the age structure of populations. It is anticipated that by 2030 almost every third person in developed countries will be over 60 years of age. This will have an impact on the patterns of labour migration as well as on the economic and political policies of developed countries.

The ageing of the population in the industrialized countries has taken more than a century. This process is expected to occur much more rapidly in the developing countries. However, in view of certain negative developments in the developing world, particularly in the African continent, where life expectancy has in fact declined, we need to further refine our projections. Coupled with the adverse effects of widespread and pervasive poverty, the phenomenon of ageing will have far-reaching implications for the efforts of developing countries to achieve the sustained economic growth and social development which are fundamental for ensuring a better quality of life for the entire population.

Pakistan is fully conscious of the challenge of the ageing of the population. As a country 40 per cent of whose population are in their teens, we are likely to be affected more acutely by this phenomenon. Pakistan launched its activities for the International Year of Older Persons on 1 October 1998.

The Government has taken various steps to ensure that older people continue to participate actively in the social, economic and political life of the country. As part of this effort, the Government has announced a package of benefits for elderly people, and is currently working on a comprehensive medicare package for older persons to ensure that they can enjoy a healthy life.

Notwithstanding the various steps being undertaken by the Government for the welfare and care of older persons, it is the family which remains the institution that must shoulder the responsibility for the care and welfare of older people in Pakistani society.

The increasing pressures of modern life and rapid urbanization are putting strains on traditional informal support structures in Pakistan. The Government is endeavouring to assist in adapting these support structures to the new demands of urbanization. We will continue to strengthen the social support base for the elderly in our

society. We also hope to gain from the experience of other countries and societies in this area through regular interaction among the members of the international community.

Mr. Adechi (Benin) (*spoke in French*): My delegation is grateful for the opportunity to speak on this agenda item. I associate myself with the views set out by Ambassador Insanally of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The observance of the International Year of Older Persons falls at the end of a cycle and at the dawn of a new era. We in Benin have a proverb: "It is at the end of the old cord that you knot the new". This means that the social microcosm depends on continuity and on change; there is no break in it, and no exclusion. That is why we welcome the stress the Year has placed on building a "society for all ages".

In the culture of Benin, as in those of many other African countries, long life is viewed as a sign of divine grace; indeed, the funeral of an elderly person is an occasion for celebration. It is on the basis of our African experience that we are participating in this debate and making our contribution on the situation of older persons in the context of assessing the International Year of Older Persons.

The ageing of the world population should not take us by surprise. It is simply the result of scientific and technological progress by humans; these scientific, technological and medical advances have been aimed, *inter alia*, at fulfilling the universal human dream of longer life. We should rather focus on the impoverishment, increasing marginalization and exclusion brought about by our socio-economic development choices, and thus take greater account of the social and human dimensions of development if we want that development to be sustainable.

In Africa in general, and in Benin in particular, older persons enjoy high esteem. Not only are they a repository of experience which society constantly draws on, but they are also the ultimate recourse for easing social tensions when these reach the breaking point. In Benin, as in many other African countries in which the majority of the population is rural, ageing is active ageing, although it must be acknowledged that it is certainly less productive, since the rural exodus is the sphere of younger people.

Hence, the problem of older persons cannot be seen basically in terms of an intergenerational dialogue, inclusion and participation in the community by older persons. It is more a question of the dignity that is inherent in their age, and of the fulfilment they have a right to expect; these are threatened by the effects of extreme poverty and the breakup of the social fabric caused by the armed conflicts and fratricidal wars that have destroyed the network of solidarity that guarded against risks of all kinds. The situation of older women is a source of even greater concern, because they suffer from a twofold handicap: they are women and they are older persons.

Because of these facts, Benin, where 7 per cent of the population consists of older persons, has established a Ministry of Social Protection and the Family, whose goals for the International Year of Older Persons included: strengthening the ability of older persons to take control of their lives; conducting a nationwide study on the situation of older persons; the establishment of geriatric centres in hospitals; and technical and financial support for income-generating projects for older persons.

Grass-roots capacity-building to increase the autonomy of rural communities; promoting microcredits to increase income; the adoption of laws on land ownership; and ensuring that basic needs are met in a generalized and fair manner with a view to strengthening community and family security systems: we view these as measures that should be addressed at a 2002 World Assembly on Ageing if we want to build a society in which individuals of all ages can live in harmony.

Ms. Morgan-Moss (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Panama endorses the statement delivered by the delegate from Guyana, who spoke on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on the issue of the International Year of Older Persons. We would like, in our turn, to report to the Assembly on the policies we have developed in our country for implementing the recommendations of the World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982.

Panama thanks the Secretary-General for his report on the subject of ageing. It identifies priority areas and the situation at the global and regional levels, along with the impact that this will have in the future on the world's peoples.

The total population of Panama amounts to 2,809,280 for the year 1999, of which 224,403 are older persons. According to the 1990 census, this figure

represents 7.6 per cent of our population. By the year 2000, the percentage will rise to 8.1.

In our country, the population of older persons reflects the pattern typical of our part of the world: rapid growth as reflected by the census data for the seventies, eighties and nineties, with a substantial and sustained rise into the new millennium. The low infant mortality rate, decline in the fertility rate, declining birth rates and increasing life expectancies are creating this phenomenon.

Women begin to outnumber men as they get older because of the higher mortality rate for men at more advanced ages. The proportion is three widows for every widower. The belief is that one of the reasons for the differences in mortality between men and women is the general tendency of men to run greater health risks, while women have more prevention-oriented behaviour and go to the doctor more often than do men, resulting in longer life expectancy.

Life expectancy for Panamanian citizens is estimated to be 72.5 years, and it is expected that for the five-year period 1995-2000 it will be 73.3. Currently women have a life expectancy at birth of 74.1 in the cities and 69.9 in the countryside. The Panamanian population, though it has remained young in structure, reflects a slight but sustained ageing trend. The average age of Panamanians is 22 years.

Panama has entered into a variety of commitments as it has participated in various international events in the period from 1990 through 1999; these have served as tools and guidelines in designing plans, programmes and policies geared towards older persons. These are being driven by the Ministry of Youth, Women, Children and the Family through the National Council on Older Persons, created by virtue of Decree-Law No. 23 of 24 June 1999.

To commemorate the International Year of Older Persons, activities such as literary contests, parades and a variety of cultural events have been developed, with highlights such as the Week of Older Persons from 16 through 20 November, teachers' conferences, the national meeting of retired persons and pensioners, nationwide talks on ageing and information, education and communications campaigns on ageing. The preparation, adoption and promulgation of a decree-law establishing a single nationwide set of rules to govern centres and nursing homes for older persons was very important.

Publicizing the principles developed by the United Nations for the benefit of older persons, research on risk factors impairing the functional autonomy of older adults, the Flower Games for Seniors organized by the Social Security Administration and the Ministry of Youth, Women, Children and the Family from 23 through 26 February of this year, training seminars on first aid in May and on care and treatment for older persons in August, integrating the theme of ageing and working activities related to ageing into national events and commemorations such as International Family Day on 15 May and Family Week in June — all these are among the many additional ways that the Government of Panama is seeking to mark and promote the International Year of Older Persons.

We must not let the enormous repercussions of the demographic revolution go unnoticed, for it affects every individual, family, neighbourhood and nation of the world. The organization of society will feel the effects of this new reality as the population continues to grow older.

Let us realize that the older population represents a challenge for humanity for which we must find a commensurate response. As our tireless and admirable fighter to whom we owe so much, Mrs. Julia Alvarez, the Ambassador of the Dominican Republic, has said, we will not let all these efforts end at the stroke of midnight on 31 December of this year.

Mr. Benítez Saénz (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, the delegation of Uruguay appreciates the report by the Secretary-General, A/54/268, for its sweeping overview of the commemoration of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons, inspired by the idea of a society for all ages. We would highlight the efforts by the Division for Social Policy and Development in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as well as by those in the Commission for Social Development and its Chairman, Mr. Aurelio Fernández, to promote a new awareness of this issue, as well as their work in preparing strategies in concert with Governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the entire spectrum of civil society.

My delegation would like to pay particular tribute to the work done by Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez, whose conviction and indefatigable commitment have guided and constantly spurred us on in our work.

The ageing of the population is a major social problem for many countries. The international community has progressively become more aware of the impact

which this phenomenon is having on societies, on economies and on culture in general.

Phenomena such as a high concentration of the population in the urban centres, the processes of industrialization, development of the service sector, a change the role of women in the home and in society, transformations of the workforce, increased poverty and marginalization of some parts of society and an expansion of the informal sector of employment — all this has weighed on the question of old age, in the world and in Uruguay.

These developments have led to a change in the age distribution of the population, including a rise in the proportion of the population that is elderly. In Uruguay, during the period 1990-1995 the number of people under 15 years of age decreased by 2 per cent, whereas the number of those 65 or older increased by 1.5 per cent. During the same period the average life expectancy at birth rose from 70 to 74 years. Further, it is expected that the proportion of the adult population over 65 years of age will continue to increase, reaching almost 14 per cent of the total population by the year 2025, and life expectancy at birth will rise to 81 years.

As with a considerable number of moderately and highly developed countries, in Uruguay the transformation of the population is affecting such fundamental areas as the structure of the labour pool, the social security system and health-care systems. In addition, the growth of the older population may lead to changes in production and consumption patterns. The implications of these processes for the family and for society as a whole are considerable and unprecedented.

In preparation for the International Year of Older Persons, a series of activities was launched in Uruguay. The first was the establishment in 1995 of our National Programme of Solidarity with Older Persons. The aim of this Programme was to deal with this major public issue in various sectors of the social sphere through an interdisciplinary, integral and global approach. The fundamental goals of the national policy on ageing are to create a national awareness enabling us to recognize the value of older persons and of their integral development, their integration into family and national life, and the promotion of the concept of productive ageing. It is our understanding that the ageing process of a population is part of the development of a community; that healthy ageing, in particular, allows older persons to play a major role in their families and in the economy as a whole; and that the process affords opportunities for learning, development and a continuing contribution to society.

Within this context of preparatory activities, in August 1997 in Montevideo, the Latin American Parliament and the Pan American Health Organization held an international forum on ageing. At that forum were 115 representatives from 21 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and the United States. They adopted the Montevideo declaration, which presented agreed recommendations in five specific areas: social security, health protection and promotion, housing and community services, productive ageing and intergenerational relations, and the preparations for the International Year of Older Persons.

At the subregional level — following through on the resolutions adopted in Buenos Aires in December 1997, at the first meeting on the social aspects of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) — in September 1998 the National Institute for Solidarity with Older Persons held a seminar on older persons involving the exchange of regional experiences. Seminar discussions analysed the demographics of ageing, social well-being, protecting older persons, informal education and integrating older persons into communities. Experiences of intergenerational integration were compared.

In Uruguay we have recognized the need to increase awareness of the changes and implications brought on by an ageing society, because we understand the importance of striking a proper balance between the legitimate aspirations of the young and those of older persons.

In the context of the global campaign of postcards from older persons — a campaign organized with a view to commemorating both the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Year of Older Persons — an elderly man from Uruguay wrote:

> "No one gets old simply by having lived a certain number of years. You only get old when you abandon your ideals. The years wrinkle the skin, but only the loss of enthusiasm wrinkles the soul."

We therefore trust that this special commemoration of the General Assembly will make a valuable contribution to the definition of long-range strategies on ageing, and that the efforts to integrate older persons into a society for all ages will continue.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before we hear the next speaker, I would like to propose that the list of speakers be closed 10 minutes from now.

It was so decided.

Mr. Sychov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The Government of the Republic of Belarus attaches great importance to the activities of the United Nations in the area of ageing. Protecting and assisting older persons is one of the basic thrusts of the national social policy of Belarus.

At present, the total population of the Republic of Belarus is 10.3 million, of which 2 million are elderly people — 988 of them being 100 years of age or older. The constant increase in the proportion of the total population that is elderly means that we need to improve existing mechanisms and create new ones for assisting older persons.

Pursuant to the decisions taken by the General Assembly regarding the observance in 1999 of the International Year of Older Persons, with the slogan, "Towards a society for all ages", the Republic of Belarus established a national commission to prepare for the commemoration of the Year. This commission was headed by the Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus. It elaborated and adopted a plan of basic actions. The main principle of the plan is the active, direct participation of each ministry, along with other national and local organs of State administration, businesses, associations and organizations, in the observance of the International Year of Older Persons. The basic focus was on practical steps to provide social protection and assistance to older people in the country.

In order to improve social services for older people we adopted a plan for social service centres for senior citizens and the disabled. The main aim of creating these centres is to provide maximum, comprehensive assistance to these people. Houses for social services are being established to serve people in small, remote areas. Throughout the country there are 176 social service centres, which include subsidized stores and facilities for medical teams and household services. Cultural events and meetings of educational groups and of staff of social service agencies are held in these centres.

The legislative basis is being improved for the social protection of veterans. The House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus has heard the first reading of a draft bill of the Republic calling for the introduction of changes and additions to the Republic's law on veterans. A great deal is being done to prepare this draft bill for consideration in a second reading.

In the context of measures to commemorate the International Year of Older Persons, the Government of Belarus has elaborated a draft programme to support the Republic's national and local veterans' organizations for the period 2000-2005.

In order to resolve the problem of improving pension coverage and the differentiation in pension sizes based on previous earnings, in March 1999 a decree was adopted by the President of the Republic of Belarus on additional measures to improve pension coverage for citizens. As a result of the implementation of the decree, the level of pension coverage has risen for over one third of pensioners.

In the context of events to commemorate the International Year of Older Persons, a geriatric service has been organized in Belarus and a laboratory established for the medical and social problems of the elderly. A Republican Gerontology Centre has also been established and a public institute known as Health for the Elderly is now functioning. A seminar was also held on the role of the mass media in creating a healthy lifestyle. In preparation for the International Year, a statistical reference book, entitled *Older Persons in the Republic of Belarus*, was published.

It is important to note that, in resolving the problem of social protection for the elderly, local executive and administrative organs have cooperated very closely with public organizations for veterans and the disabled, the charitable fund, the committees of the Red Cross and trade unions.

The delegation of the Republic of Belarus agrees with the section of the Secretary-General's report on the responsibility of Governments and on choosing one's own approach to implementing in practical terms the concept of a society for all ages. We believe that older persons are the pride and wealth of a country; in the future, we will help to meet their most vital needs.

The Government of Belarus reaffirms its commitment to the United Nations principles for older persons and its willingness to contribute to the Organization's future activities on the outcome of the

International Year of Older Persons in order to implement the concept of a society for all ages.

Mrs. Fouda (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): My country is delighted to have this opportunity to participate in the debate on such an important topic. This is a question that concerns us all, since it pertains to a period of life during which we are particularly vulnerable, just as we are in our earliest years when we need more assistance and the support of a helping hand.

Aware of the importance of this subject, the General Assembly decided in its resolution 33/52 of 14 December 1978 to organize a World Assembly on Ageing to launch an International Plan of Action to ensure the economic and social security of the elderly and to enable them to continue to contribute to social development.

As I stressed in February at a meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the problem of old age has a very strong cultural dimension that can be seen in different ways depending on a country's cultures and traditions. In traditional Africa, old age is the beautiful age. The elderly are considered to be wise and are venerated as the repositories of ancestral wisdom, the guardians of our customs and traditions, and the regulators of the daily life of clans and families. Young people learn about life from them. Their death is generally considered to be a great loss to the community. Do we not say, after all, that an old person who dies is a library that has burned down?

The central and in many respects enviable role of the elderly in traditional African society defines the way they are treated by other members of the family or clan. The older person generally grows within the family circle, where he or she enjoys the affection of the family and benefits from its constant assistance. Rendering such assistance is considered to be a sacred duty and members of the younger generation are happy to do so out of gratitude for the care they have received. In traditional society, and in our African understanding, the elderly are naturally integrated into the family environment, where they receive their children and grandchildren and the care and welfare that their advanced age and economic inactivity require.

The customs of Cameroonian society do not provide for an older person's being separated from the family environment to be placed in an institution or retirement home. On the contrary, the retirement into isolation that is dictated by socio-economic considerations in the West is seen in Africa as the result of the family's or community's dereliction of its age-old duties and obligations. In Cameroon, which has over 15 million inhabitants, the elderly make up 6 per cent of the population and will account for 10 per cent by 2050, according to the estimates of the United Nations Population Fund.

Despite the existence of the family structure, which basically provides the context for managing that segment of the population, it should be noted that the dependent status of the elderly is already being felt. Because of urbanization, apartments are growing smaller and more costly. Many children do not live with their parents and the elderly no longer cultivate the land with their children because of the reduction of jobs through structural adjustment policies.

Although the problem of an ageing population in Cameroon has not yet become as acute as it is in some countries, my Government has nevertheless established a policy on ageing that integrates the need to prepare young people to live an active old age. With respect to rules and regulations, practical steps for protecting older persons have been prepared in various codes regulating social life. In the Civil Code, based on the Napoleonic Code, the obligation to assist and support parents is imposed on their children. In the Penal Code, neglect, exploitation and abandonment of dependent elders are punishable. In the Work Code, a retirement pension is a legal right.

These regulations are supplemented by various social, health, administrative and cultural measures. The Government, through its many social welfare activities, is trying to improve the well-being of the elderly by providing material and psycho-social assistance. With respect to health care, geriatric services have been established in certain health agencies. With respect to administration, a special service has been created to protect and reintegrate the elderly under the Department of National Solidarity of the Ministry for Social Affairs.

Certain traditional chiefs have the status of auxiliary public administration officials, whereas other, more experienced people play the role of resourcers in the day-to-day management of communal life and in certain legal jurisdictions, where they serve as assessors.

Culturally, a literacy programme was set up for the elderly, known as "The school under the tree". This successful programme, which is oriented more towards rural populations, seeks to improve the reading and

writing abilities of people in this age group. All the arrangements that I have described are based on Cameroonian traditions, which encourage keeping older people in the family environment. Non-governmental organizations and other associations also use this environment to improve the well-being of these people. My country has already provided some facilities to ensure the well-being of abandoned old people — for example Bethany Viacam Centre, the Home of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the works of Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity, all located on the outskirts of Yaoundé.

Properly combining tradition and modernity to confront the problems of ageing is a real challenge for developing countries such as mine, which must also fight widespread poverty. Accordingly, international solidarity is absolutely imperative. My country is therefore happy to have this opportunity to participate in the debate on this important item. It is a matter which concerns us all, dealing with a period of life when we are particularly vulnerable, a period similar to the one when we took our first steps and needed assistance and a helping hand.

Mr. Kasanda (Zambia): My delegation associates itself with the statement made by Ambassador Insanally, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Guyana to the United Nations, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. This statement adequately expressed the positions on social development, including the world social situation in general and the situation of older persons in particular.

I also welcome the statement made by the Deputy Secretary-General on Monday to this Assembly regarding the commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999. I confirm my Government's strong appreciation of the efforts of the United Nations in preparing for the Year, as reflected in the Secretary-General's report (A/54/268), which my delegation found most helpful. The International Year of Older Persons has provided us with an opportunity to appreciate the contributions of older persons to human development. During this Year media attention was drawn to the activities and the situation of older persons, and in particular to the conditions under which they live.

My Government has long recognized the important role social development plays in economic and human development. Indeed, the fight against unemployment, social disintegration and poverty cannot be fully meaningful unless measures are taken at the international, regional and, indeed, national levels to adequately address the socio-economic problems which are inevitably associated with social development. We are convinced that through these measures we will be responding to the situation of youths, ageing disabled persons and the family, as outlined in the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the United Nations World Summit for Social Development, convened at Copenhagen, Denmark, in March 1995.

The commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 is, therefore, a welcome development, it is because of the foresight and commitment of the older persons of today that the world enjoys the high levels of human development that we know. Older persons shaped the present century, and thanks to their wisdom, humankind can collectively, as we complete the last year of the twentieth century, confront with confidence the challenges of the third millennium.

In spite of the acknowledged achievements and contributions of older persons to modern civilization, the world does not appear to have paid much attention to their specific needs and roles. With due regard to the disparities that exist between the developing and the developed countries, there is a need to allocate adequate resources to programmes and institutions serving older persons in all countries. The situation of older persons is made even worse by the gap between the rich and the poor within a given society. Older persons are in certain cases still viewed in many countries as a burden rather than the asset that they are.

The Zambian Government, in commemorating 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons, undertook several projects to strengthen institutional capacities for the aged, including the rehabilitation of homes for the aged. The Department of Social Welfare in the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services mobilized material and financial resources in support of aged persons in the care of both Government agencies and non-governmental organizations. Large quantities of foodstuffs and clothing were provided to older persons in these institutions.

The Government of Zambia also marked the International Year of Older Persons by focusing attention on the contributions made by older persons in our country to national development. In this regard, national awards were given to deserving individuals at a colourful ceremony held at State House in Lusaka.

While Governments strive to improve the situation of older persons, it is important that the United Nations, through the appropriate agencies, continue to provide the necessary coordination in the full implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the United Nations World Summit for Social Development, which addressed the issues of ageing in the context of development.

Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada): It is right, fitting and proper that one of the highlights of the turn of the century and the beginning of a new millennium should be to focus on the International Year of Older Persons, some in the twilight and others in the sunset of their lives.

The great English philosopher and jurist, Sir Francis Bacon, in one of his essays in 1605, glorified age or the elderly in the following way: "Age is best in four ways: old wood the best to burn, old wine the best to drink, old books the best to read, and old friends the best to keep." This philosophical perception of age is very comforting and indeed inspiring to the ears of older persons like myself, now on the cusp of my eightieth year, still holding on to the belief that instead of adding years to my life, I am adding life to my years.

It is in this spirit, therefore, and with this in mind, that my delegation greets, salutes and congratulates Ambassador Julia Alvarez, of the Dominican Republic, for her invaluable contribution and for her championing and working so assiduously to promote the activities of the United Nations Programme of Action on Ageing in celebration of the International Year of Older Persons.

It might be useful from a historical perspective to highlight the evolutionary process leading to the International Year. The international community first debated the question of ageing in 1948 at the United Nations, on the initiative of Argentina. In 1969 Malta again raised the issue, and in 1982 the United Nations convened the World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna. This was followed later that year by the United Nations endorsement of the International Plan of Action on Ageing; and in 1990, 1 October was designated the International Day of Older Persons. On 16 December 1991, the United Nations Principles for Older Persons were adopted by the General Assembly and organized into the following five clusters: first, independence of thought, action and movement of older persons; secondly, participation and association by sharing their knowledge and skills with younger generations; thirdly, care, including health of body and mind, protection from want, enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms; fourthly, self-fulfilment, through education, cultural, spiritual and recreational activities; and fifthly, dignity, by being safe and secure and free from exploitation, physical or mental abuse, regardless of age, gender and racial or ethnic background.

Many countries and cultures have adopted these Principles and incorporated them into their national agendas. My own country, Grenada, with scarce financial resources, has only recently improved the lives of pensioners by a healthy increase in their monthly allowance.

In this celebration of the International Year of Older Persons, the theme of which is "Towards a society for all ages", we are reminded of the words of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who said,

> "A society for all is one that does not caricature older persons as patients and pensioners. Instead, it sees them as both agents and beneficiaries of development. It honours traditional elders in their leadership and consultative roles in communities throughout the world".

This forward-looking role for older persons contrasts with the attitude towards them at the beginning of the twentieth century, when life expectancy worldwide was 20 years less than it is today, when older persons with no families, no employment, no recreation, no social services and no social security had to fend for themselves in what should have been the golden years of their lives. Then it used to be said that the worst thing that could happen to someone was to be old, poor and sick. President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States immortalized himself, while giving dignity and support to the elderly, by introducing the saving net of social security in America.

Age can be both an opportunity and a drag — an opportunity to share knowledge and experience, a drag because of loneliness and lack of companionship. However, according to the writings of the immortal Plato, many centuries before Christ,

> "He who is of a calm and happy nature will hardly feel the pressures of age, but to him who is of an opposite disposition, youth and age alike are equally burdensome".

Finally, the following verse comes to mind:

Journey through the years.
Speak with kindness; cause no tears.
Do some good along the way. Do a little every day.
Let no good by thee be marred. Let no duty seem too hard.
In all things do your best.
And then to God you'll leave the rest.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): I have the honour, on behalf of Sri Lanka, to participate in this important consideration in the General Assembly of the vast and global problem of the ageing of populations around the world.

The fact that this is in all probability the last debate on the subject of ageing that will take place in the General Assembly — this year, this century, this millennium — gives this debate special significance. The number of speakers that have addressed the Assembly on the subject of ageing speaks to the importance of the subject. They have spoken eloquently. With what they have said, Sri Lanka would concur.

I would only wish, on behalf of Sri Lanka, to reaffirm that the treatment of the elderly — and, as we all know, the shadows lengthen for each one of us — should be such that it is thoughtful, constructive and kind: to derive from the old the wisdom of their years, to treat them with the gentleness and the benevolence that accords with this world's concern for the dignity of the individual human being.

Sri Lanka has been greatly moved and greatly inspired by the work of the United Nations in the field of ageing. I would like to take this opportunity of briefly informing the Assembly of some of the measures that Sri Lanka has taken, in the light of the teachings of the United Nations, in the field of ageing.

An Action Plan for the International Year of Older Persons was prepared in Sri Lanka and is being implemented by the National Committee on Ageing. The measures included in the Plan are the following: raising awareness among the general public on the problems of an ageing society; the introduction of a special identity card for older persons; improvement of health-related facilities for the benefit of older persons; educating and encouraging schoolchildren in providing care to the elderly; introducing a social security scheme for those of the elderly who are not entitled to a Government pension or to a provident fund benefit; and organizing and preparing a home help service scheme. Training programmes and seminars and workshops for retired Government officials have also been introduced.

The Government of Sri Lanka remains totally committed to the International Plan of Action on Ageing and has made elaborate plans for its implementation. A National Committee that had originally been set up in 1982 was re-established in 1991 to work out a national policy and plan of action for the promotion of the welfare of the older persons.

In Sri Lanka, 1999 is being observed as the Year of Older Persons, and the National Committee of Sri Lanka has reformulated its policies and revised its activities.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the objective of the Government of Sri Lanka is to provide our country with adequate leadership and initiative in matters of policy to ensure that there is a healthy environment created in Sri Lanka for older persons within the cultural mores and religious practices of the country.

Finally, may I thank in particular Ambassador Julia Alvarez for her valuable contributions to transforming the idea of an International Year of Older Persons into such a wonderful reality.

I would also like to thank Mr. Aurelio Fernández, Counsellor for Social Affairs of the Permanent Mission of Spain, for all that he has done.

Mr. García González (El Salvador) *(spoke in Spanish)*: I wish to congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his skilful stewardship of these important meetings devoted to the follow-up of the International Year of Older Persons. We also wish, through him, to extend our thanks to the Secretary-General for his report on this issue, contained in document A/54/268. That report has given us an appreciation of the scope and effects within the international community of the observance of this Year.

My delegation also endorses and supports the ideas expressed by the representative of the Group of 77 and China on this item.

According to a variety of studies carried out by social researchers and regional bodies, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the population of Latin America

and the Caribbean is ageing. Progress in their living standards, particularly in terms of health, and, notably, the sustained decline in birth rates have led to a considerable lengthening of people's life expectancy and to a rapid rise in the proportion of older persons in the total population.

El Salvador is aware that this increase in the number of older persons represents for our country and for the region at large a challenge to which we must find an appropriate response, particularly bearing in mind that the living conditions of this major sector of our population are not favourable.

Therefore, with the establishment of the National Family Secretariat in 1989, the Salvadoran Government sought to offer an institutional response to the disadvantageous situation being endured by vulnerable groups in our country, in particular the elderly. To that end a set of instruments and national guidelines was devised, inspired, *inter alia*, by the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which acknowledges the intrinsic dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.

These measures were also inspired by the recommendations of the World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982, the Guadalajara Declaration of July 1991, the agreements on social security adopted at the Ibero-American Summit held in Madrid in July 1992, the Cartagena declaration on comprehensive policies for older persons in the Ibero-American area and the consensus declaration on policies of care for older persons in Latin America adopted in Santiago de Chile in November 1992.

This set of commitments undertaken through various conferences, conventions and regional and international summit conferences contributed to the devising and defining by the Salvadoran Government of our national policy of caring for elderly persons. This national policy and the actions emanating from it are designed to direct appropriate attention to the need to promote an independent life for, and achieve the full participation of, older persons in the social and economic life of our country. The guiding principles for all our steps geared to this end are universality, normalization and democratization.

In line with the principle of universality, the Salvadoran Government will have to strive to ensure that our resources meet the basic needs of all older persons. To this end, we envisage measures to benefit all sectors of the older population, taking care to ensure that needs are met for those living in the countryside and in outlying urban areas, older women, disabled older persons and all groups of older persons who because of their race, culture, religion, economic situation or political ideas might have limited access to all kinds of services and comprehensive care.

The principle of normalization reflects in turn the right of older persons to live the decent kind of life to which they have been accustomed, while at the same time benefiting, along with the rest of the population, from all the social and economic progress and improvement the country experiences.

The principle of democratization is designed to allow enjoyment of the right to a full life and to participate in the economic, social and cultural development of the community through the formulation of policies, strategies and measures geared to improving quality of life.

When the United Nations proclaimed 1999 the International Year of Older Persons, the slogan "A society for all ages" was adopted, and four facets were defined for focusing the work in this respect: the situation of older persons, lifelong individual development, multigenerational relationships and population ageing and development of the population.

As part of our national policy of caring for the elderly, the Government of El Salvador attached great importance to promoting and developing an intergenerational dialogue. We consider this a fundamental tool for building that "society for all ages". We are stressing the need to foster participation by and partnership between the young and the elderly in projects of national scope; decentralizing specialized services in greatest demand in order to make them more accessible; and creating geriatric units staffed by medical teams and multidisciplinary specialized personnel able to develop out-patient and hospital care, to name just a few measures.

Through these policy steps and activities designed to provide comprehensive care, the Salvadoran Government has commemorated the International Year of Older Persons. At the same time, we have laid the groundwork for further development by revising and updating the national policy of caring for elderly persons and have begun to meet the challenge of the ageing of our subregion's population.

In conclusion, allow me to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of El Salvador to continue to make strides in the building of a society for all ages through the full implementation of our national policy of care for the elderly and by lending a human dimension to ageing, as Ambassador Julia Tavares de Álvares of the Dominican Republic said at the ceremony that launched the International Year of Older Persons on 1 October 1998.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: In accordance with the decision adopted earlier by the General Assembly, I now call on the Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Martino (Holy See): The Holy See welcomes this opportunity to join in the discussion of the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. It is a topic the Holy See has followed with the closest interest, and it is with satisfaction that we have seen the considerable strides that have been made in mainstreaming the concerns of older persons into the work of the United Nations.

We live in an age of sweeping demographic changes, a time when the estimated population of the aged in the world is 600 million out of 6 billion, and when it is estimated to grow to 2 billion out of 8.9 billion by 2050. By that time, if projections prove true, the population of older persons will be larger than the population of children under 14. Persons over 60 have become a significant segment of the world population and an important factor in any attempt to plan for social development.

For too long, however, the aged have been a neglected and often invisible section of the population, often missing the interest of development planners. Many of the aged are fragile and ill and do not have access to adequate health care. Some institutions do not want to maintain the chronically ill or those who are unlikely to recover, and insurers do not want to pay.

Among the most serious difficulties from which aged people suffer are, of course, the economic ones. Because of the reduction in income that comes after retirement, a high percentage of older people find themselves living near the poverty level. Government schemes, where they exist, are generally inadequate, and inflation becomes a serious menace. As a result, the aged sometimes even cut back on their food, and nutritional deficiencies ensue.

Among the problems from which the aged suffer the worst are loneliness and a sense of marginalization. In a world which values productivity so highly, elderly people are often deemed unproductive and, indeed, are too often considered a burden to others. Even when not obliged to leave the workforce because of mandatory retirement, the older worker in urban areas is often regarded as ineffective or unprepared to take on new tasks, and he or she often encounters active discrimination when seeking work. This leaves him or her with a sense of uselessness.

Perhaps none are more marginalized than the elderly without family connections. Prior to the twentieth century, care of the aged was considered a family responsibility. But today most adult children are working, without anything like family leave available to them. When aged parents need help, they are very often left without affectionate, caring presences to fill their loneliness. According to a survey undertaken some time ago among the National Councils of Catholic Bishops by the Opera Pia, a Catholic Church society for the ageing, nearly all societies reported overt or underlying marginalization of the aged that cut across the economic, psychological and social aspects of their lives.

For its part, the Holy See is strongly convinced of the value of older persons — with their accumulated experience, skills and wisdom, based on their unique, irreplaceable humanity. This concern is manifested in the work the Church does for the aged poor, in the 12,000 nursing homes for the aged that it maintains worldwide and in the devoted efforts of the many religious orders that care for the aged. Major research in gerontology is being done in Catholic universities throughout the world. Catholic hospitals have been pioneers in designing palliative care. Only last March the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Holy See's office designated as the focal point for the coordination of the Holy See's activities for the International Year of Older Persons, issued a document entitled "The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and in the World", which reaffirmed the primary importance of recognizing and fostering the intrinsic value of persons of all ages. This document was distributed last March to all Permanent Representatives accredited to the United Nations.

The Church's view of ageing is deeply rooted in biblical tradition. In the Old Testament a long life is seen as one of the signs of God's presence among his people. Scripture tells us that a sign of the return to peace would be that old men and women would sit again in the square of Jerusalem. In the New Testament, Saint Peter reminds the early Christians to do what the elders ask of them.

Pope John Paul II has often stressed the importance of the work done to assist the elderly. In one of his recent statements on the subject he said:

> "By their very presence, older people remind everyone, especially the young, that life on earth is a parable with its own beginning and end: to find its fulfilment, life must be based on values that are not transient and superficial, but solid and profound."

In conclusion, Pope John Paul reminds us that,

> "the so-called third age is ... a value in itself by the very fact that life is prolonged and life itself is a gift of God."

It has been said that the worth of a civilization is to be measured by the attention it offers to its aged. The Holy See congratulates the General Assembly on its efforts during the International Year of Older Persons, and urges society to undertake ever more positive initiatives on their behalf.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this agenda item.

I now call on the representative of the Dominican Republic to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.6.

Mrs. Álvarez (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the delegations of Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Benin, Colombia, Cyprus, Ecuador, El Salvador, Germany, Ghana, Guyana, Malta, Mongolia, Panama, Peru, Romania, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and my own delegation, which were the original sponsors, as well as the delegations of Argentina, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Guatemala, India, Jamaica, Monaco, Nicaragua, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, Venezuela and Viet Nam, which have joined us, I have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.6, "Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: a society for all ages".

I shall not dwell on the various paragraphs of this draft resolution that we believe are self-explanatory; I shall confine myself to stressing some of the operative paragraphs that we deem to be worthy of particular attention.

By paragraph 1, the Assembly would note that there is a need for guidelines and recommendations reflecting the current situation of societies and older persons in order to design and support adequate age-related policies.

By paragraph 2 it would emphasize the need to address the developmental aspects of ageing with particular attention to the situation of developing countries.

In paragraph 7, the General Assembly invites the Committee on Human Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to include in their questionnaires addressed to States parties questions relevant to older persons, and to address such questions during the examination of the reports of States parties.

The Assembly, in paragraph 9, encourages regional initiatives to follow up on the International Year of Older Persons and to provide input into the process of revision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, given that different regions and countries are at different stages of population ageing and need to identify specific policy responses in order to achieve the goal of "A society for all ages".

In paragraph 10, the Assembly takes notes with appreciation of the offer by the Government of Germany to host, if approved, a regional ministerial conference on ageing, under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Europe, in 2002.

In paragraph 11, the Assembly decides entrust the Commission for Social Development with the project of a revision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the elaboration of a long term strategy on ageing, based on new developments since 1982 and on the experience of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, with a view to the adoption of a revised plan of action and of a long-term strategy on ageing in 2002.

Finally, in paragraph 15, the General Assembly takes note with appreciation of the offer by the Government of Spain to host, if approved, a second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002.

We the sponsors of this draft resolution believe that its adoption would ensure an appropriate follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. We hope that we can count on the support of all delegations.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to inform members that in order to allow more time for consultations, action on draft resolution A/54/L.6, which has been formally introduced, will be taken at a later date.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.